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THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

(IN TEN VOLUMES)

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VOLUME SIX

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THE WORLD'S BEST 100 DETECTIVE STORIES

A. CONAN DOYLE

THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE GARRIDEBS

It may have been a comedy, or it may have been a tragedy. It cost one man his reason, it cost me a blood-letting, and it cost yet another man the penalties of the law. Yet there was certainly an element of comedy. Well, you shall judge for yourselves.

I remember the date very well, for it was in the same month that Holmes refused a knighthood for services which may perhaps some day be described. I only refer to the matter in passing, for in my position of partner and confidant I am obliged to be particularly careful to avoid any indiscretion. I repeat, however, that this enables me to fix the date, which was the latter end of June, 1902, shortly after the conclusion of the South African War. Holmes had spent several days in bed, as was his habit from time to time, but he emerged that morning with a long foolscap document in his hand and a twinkle of amusement in his austere grey eyes.

"There is a chance for you to make some money, friend Watson," said he. "Have you ever heard the name of Garrideb?"

I admitted that I had not.

"Well, if you can lay your hand upon a Garrideb, there's money in it."

"Why?"

(From "The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes," by A. Conan Doyle. Copyright, 1927, by Doubleday, Doran & Company, New York, and by John Murray, London, England.)

"Ah, that's a long story—rather a whimsical one, too. I don't think in all our explorations of human complexities we have ever come upon anything more singular. The fellow will be here presently for cross-examination, so I won't open the matter up till he comes. But meanwhile, that's the name we want."

The telephone directory lay on the table beside me, and I turned over the pages in a rather hopeless quest. But to my amazement there was this strange name in its due place. I gave a cry of triumph.

"Here you are, Holmes! Here it is!"

Holmes took the book from my hand.

"'Garrideb, N.,'" he read, "'136 Little Ryder Street, W.' Sorry to disappoint you, my dear Watson, but this is the man himself. That is the address upon his letter. We want another to match him."

Mrs. Hudson had come in with a card upon a tray. I took it up and glanced at it.

"Why, here it is!" I cried in amazement. "This is a different initial. John Garrideb. Counsellor at Law, Moorville, Kansas, U.S.A."

Holmes smiled as he looked at the card. "I am afraid you must make yet another effort, Watson," said he. "This gentleman is also in the plot already, though I certainly did not expect to see him this morning. However, he is in a position to tell us a good deal which I want to know."

A moment later he was in the room. Mr. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, was a short, powerful man with the round, fresh, clean-shaven face characteristic of so many American men of affairs. The general effect was chubby and rather childlike, so that one received the impression of quite a young man with a broad set smile upon his face. His eyes, however, were arresting. Seldom in any human head have I seen a pair which bespoke a more intense inward life, so bright were they, so alert, so responsive to every change of thought. His accent was American, but was not accompanied by any eccentricity of speech.

"Mr. Holmes?" he asked, glancing from one to the other. "Ah, yes! Your pictures are not unlike you, sir, if I may say so. I believe you have had a letter from my namesake, Mr. Nathan Garrideb, have you not?"

"Pray sit down," said Sherlock Holmes. "We shall, I fancy, have a good deal to discuss." He took up his sheets of foolscap. "You are, of course, the Mr. John Garrideb mentioned in this document. But surely you have been in England some time?"

"Why do you say that, Mr. Holmes?" I seemed to read sudden suspicion in those expressive eyes.

"Your whole outfit is English."

Mr. Garrideb forced a laugh. "I've read of your tricks, Mr. Holmes, but I never thought I would be the subject of them. Where do you read that?"

"The shoulder cut of your coat, the toes of your boots —could anyone doubt it?"

"Well, well, I had no idea I was so obvious a Britisher. But business brought me over here some time ago, and so, as you say, my outfit is nearly all London. However, I guess your time is of value, and we did not meet to talk about the cut of my socks. What about getting down to that paper you hold in your hand?"

Holmes had in some way ruffled our visitor, whose chubby face had assumed a far less amiable expression.

"Patience! Patience, Mr. Garrideb!" said my friend in a soothing voice. "Dr. Watson would tell you that these little digressions of mine sometimes prove in the end to have some bearing on the matter. But why did Mr. Nathan Garrideb not come with you?"

"Why did he ever drag you into it at all?" asked our visitor, with a sudden outflame of anger. "What in thunder had you to do with it? Here was a bit of professional business between two gentleman, and one of them must needs call in a detective! I saw him this morning, and he told me this fool-trick he had played me, and that's why I am here. But I feel bad about it, all the same."

"There was no reflection upon you, Mr. Garrideb. It was simply zeal upon his part to gain your end—an end

which is, I understand, equally vital for both of you. He knew that I had means of getting information, and, therefore, it was very natural that he should apply to me."

Our visitor's angry face gradually cleared.

"Well, that puts it different," said he. "When I went to see him this morning and he told me he had sent to a detective, I just asked for your address and came right away. I don't want police butting into a private matter. But if you are content just to help us find the man, there can be no harm in that."

"Well, that is just how it stands," said Holmes. "And now, sir, since you are here, we had best have a clear account from your own lips. My friend here knows nothing of the details."

Mr. Garrideb surveyed me with not too friendly a gaze.

"Need he know?" he asked.

"We usually work together."

"Well, there's no reason it should be kept a secret. I'll give you the facts as short as I can make them. If you came from Kansas I would not need to explain to you who Alexander Hamilton Garrideb was. He made his money in real estate, and afterwards in the wheat pit at Chicago, but he spent it in buying up as much land as would make one of your counties, lying along the Arkansas River, west of Fort Dodge. It's grazing-land and lumber-land and arable-land and mineralized-land, and just every sort of land that brings dollars to the man that owns it.

"He had no kith nor kin—or, if he had, I never heard of it. But he took a kind of pride in the queerness of his name. That was what brought us together. I was in the law at Topeka, and one day I had a visit from the old man, and he was tickled to death to meet another man with his own name. It was his pet fad, and he was dead set to find out if there were any more Garridebs in the world. 'Find me another!' said he. I told him I was a busy man and could not spend my life hiking round the world in search of Garridebs. 'None the less,' said he, 'that is just what you will do if things pan out as I

planned them.' I thought he was joking, but there was a powerful lot of meaning in the words, as I was soon to discover.

"For he died within a year of saying them, and he left a will behind him. It was the queerest will that has ever been filed in the State of Kansas. His property was divided into three parts, and I was to have one on condition that I found two Garridebs who would share the remainder. It's five million dollars for each if it is a cent, but we can't lay a finger on it until we all three stand in a row.

"It was so big a chance that I just let my legal practice slide and I set forth looking for Garridebs. There is not one in the United States. I went through it, sir, with a fine-toothed comb and never a Garrideb could I catch. Then I tried the old country. Sure enough there was the name in the London Telephone Directory. I went after him two days ago and explained the whole matter to him. But he is a lone man, like myself, with some women relations, but no men. It says three adult men in the will. So you see we still have a vacancy, and if you can help to fill it we will be very ready to pay your charges."

"Well, Watson," said Holmes, with a smile, "I said it was rather whimsical, did I not? I should have thought, sir, that your obvious way was to advertise in the agony columns of the papers."

"I have done that, Mr. Holmes. No replies."

"Dear me! Well, it is certainly a most curious little problem. I may take a glance at it in my leisure. By the way, it is curious that you should have come from Topeka. I used to have a correspondent—he is dead now—old Dr. Lysander Starr, who was Mayor in 1890."

"Good old Dr. Starr!" said our visitor. "His name is still honoured. Well, Mr. Holmes, I suppose all we can do is to report to you and let you know how we progress. I reckon you will hear within a day or two." With this assurance our American bowed and departed.

Holmes had lit his pipe, and he sat for some time with a curious smile upon his face.

"Well?" I asked at last.

"I am wondering, Watson—just wondering!"

"At what?"

Holmes took his pipe from his lips.

"I was wondering, Watson, what on earth could be the object of this man in telling us such a rigmarole of lies. I nearly asked him so—for there are times when a brutal frontal attack is the best policy—but I judged it better to let him think he had fooled us. Here is a man with an English coat frayed at the elbow and trousers bagged at the knee with a year's wear, and yet by this document and by his own account he is a procincial American lately landed in London. There have been no advertisements in the agony columns. You know that I miss nothing there. They are my favourite covert for putting up a bird, and I would never have overlooked such a cock pheasant as that. I never knew a Dr. Lysander Starr of Topeka. Touch him where you would he was false. I think the fellow is really an American, but he has worn his accent smooth with years of London. What is his game, then, and what motive lies behind this preposterous search for Garridebs? It's worth our attention, for, granting that the man is a rascal, he is certainly a complex and ingenious one. We must now find out if our other correspondent is a fraud also. Just ring him up, Watson."

I did so, and heard a thin, quavering voice at the other end of the line.

"Yes, yes, I am Mr. Nathan Garrideb. Is Mr. Holmes there? I should very much like to have a word with Mr. Holmes."

My friend took the instrument and I heard the usual syncopated dialogue.

"Yes, he has been here. I understand that you don't know him. . . . How long? . . . Only two days! . . . Yes, yes, of course, it is a most captivating prospect. Will you be at home this evening? I suppose your name-

sake will not be there? . . . Very good, we will come then, for I would rather have a chat without him. . . . Dr. Watson will come with me. . . . I understood from your note that you did not go out often. . . . Well, we shall be round about six. You need not mention it to the American lawyer. . . . Very good. Good-bye!"

It was twilight of a lovely spring evening, and even Little Ryder Street, one of the smaller offshoots from the Edgeware Road, within a stone-cast of old Tyburn Tree of evil memory, looked golden and wonderful in the slanting rays of the setting sun. The particular house to which we were directed was a large, old-fashioned, Early Georgian edifice with a flat brick face broken only by two deep bay windows on the ground floor. It was on this ground floor that our client lived, and, indeed, the low windows proved to be the front of the huge room in which he spent his waking hours. Holmes pointed as we passed to the small brass plate which bore the curious name.

"Up some years, Watson," he remarked, indicating its discoloured surface. "It's *his* real name, anyhow, and that is something to note."

The house had a common stair, and there were a number of names painted in the hall, some indicating offices and some private chambers. It was not a collection of residential flats, but rather the abode of Bohemian bachelors. Our client opened the door for us himself and apologized by saying that the woman in charge left at four o'clock. Mr. Nathan Garrideb proved to be a very tall, loose-joined, round-backed person, gaunt and bald, some sixty-odd years of age. He had a cadaverous face, with the dull dead skin of a man to whom exercise was unknown. Large round spectacles and a small projecting goat's beard combined with his stooping attitude to give him an expression of peering curiosity. The general effect, however, was amiable, though eccentric.

The room was as curious as its occupant. It looked like a small museum. It was both broad and deep, with cupboards and cabinets all round, crowded with specimens,

geological and anatomical. Cases of butterflies and moths flanked each side of the entrance. A large table in the centre was littered with all sorts of debris, while the tall brass tube of a powerful microscope bristled up amongst them. As I glanced round I was surprised at the universality of the man's interests. Here was a case of ancient coins. There was a cabinet of flint instruments. Behind his central table was a large cupboard of fossil bones. Above was a line of plaster skulls with such names as "Neanderthal," "Heidelberg," "Cromagnon" printed beneath them. It was clear that he was a student of many subjects. As he stood in front of us now, he held a piece of chamois leather in his right hand with which he was polishing a coin.

"Syracusan—of the best period," he explained, holding it up. "They degenerated greatly towards the end. At their best I hold them supreme, though some prefer the Alexandrian school. You will find a chair here, Mr. Holmes. Pray allow me to clear these bones. And you, sir—ah, yes, Dr. Watson—if you would have the goodness to put the Japanese vase to one side. You see round me my little interests in life. My doctor lectures me about never going out, but why should I go out when I have so much to hold me here? I can assure you that the adequate cataloguing of one of those cabinets would take me three good months."

Holmes looked round him with curiosity.

"But do you tell me that you *never* go out?" he said.

"Now and again I drive down to Sotheby's or Christie's. Otherwise I very seldom leave my room. I am not too strong, and my researches are very absorbing. But you can imagine, Mr. Holmes, what a terrific shock—pleasant but terrific—it was for me when I heard of this unparalleled good fortune. It only needs one more Garrideb to complete the matter, and surely we can find one. I had a brother, but he is dead, and female relatives are disqualified. But there must surely be others in the world. I had heard that you handled strange cases, and that was why I sent to you. Of course, this American gentleman

is quite right, and I should have taken his advice first, but I acted for the best."

"I think you acted very wisely indeed," said Holmes. "But are you really anxious to acquire an estate in America?"

"Certainly not, sir. Nothing would induce me to leave my collection. But this gentleman has assured me that he will buy me out as soon as we have established our claim. Five million dollars was the sum named. There are a dozen specimens in the market at the present moment which fill gaps in my collection, and which I am unable to purchase for want of a few hundred pounds. Just think what I could do with five million dollars. Why, I have the nucleus of a national collection. I shall be the Hans Sloane of my age."

His eyes gleamed behind his great spectacles. It was very clear that no pains would be spared by Mr. Nathan Garrideb in finding a namesake.

"I merely called to make your acquaintance, and there is no reason why I should interrupt your studies," said Holmes. "I prefer to establish personal touch with those with whom I do business. There are few questions I need ask, for I have your very clear narrative in my pocket, and I filled up the blanks when this American gentleman called. I understand that up to his week you were unaware of his existence."

"That is so. He called last Tuesday."

"Did he tell you of our interview to-day?"

"Yes, he came straight back to me. He had been very angry."

"Why should he be angry?"

"He seemed to think it was some reflection on his honour. But he was quite cheerful again when he returned."

"Did he suggest any course of action?"

"No, sir, he did not."

"Has he had, or asked for, any money from you?"

"No, sir, never!"

"You see no possible object he has in view?"

"None, except what he states."

"Did you tell him of our telephone appointment?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

Holmes was lost in thought. I could see that he was puzzled.

"Have you any articles of great value in your collection?"

"No, sir. I am not a rich man. It is a good collection, but not a very valuable one."

"You have no fear of burglars?"

"Not the least."

"How long have you been in these rooms?"

"Nearly five years."

Holmes's cross-examination was interrupted by an imperative knocking at the door. No sooner had our client unlatched it than the American lawyer burst excitedly into the room.

"Here you are!" he cried, waving a paper over his head. "I thought I should be in time to get you. Mr. Nathan Garrideb, my congratulations! You are a rich man, sir. Our business is happily finished and all is well. As to you, Mr. Holmes, we can only say we are sorry if we have given you any useless trouble."

He handed over the paper to our client, who stood staring at a marked advertisement. Holmes and I leaned forward and read it over his shoulder. This is how it ran:

HOWARD GARRIDEB

Constructor of Agricultural Machinery.
Binders, reapers, steam and hand plows, drills, harrows, farmers' carts, buck-boards, and all other appliances.
Estimates for Artesian Wells.
Apply Grosvenor Buildings, Aston.

"Glorious!" gasped our host. "That makes our third man."

"I had opened up inquiries in Birmingham," said the American, "and my agent there has sent me this advertisement from a local paper. We must hustle and put the thing through. I have written to this man and told him that you will see him in his office to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock."

"You want *me* to see him?"

"What do you say, Mr. Holmes? Don't you think it would be wiser? Here am I, a wandering American with a wonderful tale. Why should he believe what I tell him? But you are a Britisher with solid references, and he is bound to take notice of what you say. I would go with you if you wished, but I have a very busy day to-morrow, and I could always follow you if you are in any trouble."

"Well, I have not made such a journey for years."

"It is nothing, Mr. Garrideb. I have figured out our connections. You leave at twelve and should be there soon after two. Then you can be back the same night. All you have to do is to see this man, explain the matter, and get an affidavit of his existence. By the Lord!" he added hotly, "considering I've come all the way from the centre of America, it is surely little enough if you go a hundred miles in order to put this matter through."

"Quite so," said Holmes. "I think what this gentleman says is very true."

Mr. Nathan Garrideb shrugged his shoulders with a disconsolate air. "Well, if you insist I shall go," said he. "It is certainly hard for me to refuse you anything, considering the glory of hope that you have brought into my life."

"Then that is agreed," said Holmes, "and no doubt you will let me have a report as soon as you can."

"I'll see to that," said the American. "Well," he added, looking at his watch, "I'll have to get on. I'll call to-morrow, Mr. Nathan, and see you off to Birmingham. Coming my way, Mr. Holmes? Well, then, good-bye, and we may have good news for you to-morrow night."

I noticed that my friend's face cleared when the Ameri-

can left the room, and the look of thoughtful perplexity had vanished.

"I wish I could look over your collection, Mr. Garrideb," said he. "In my profession all sorts of odd knowledge comes useful, and this room of yours is a storehouse of it."

Our client shone with pleasure and his eyes gleamed from behind his big glasses.

"I have always heard, sir, that you were a very intelligent man," said he. "I could take you round now, if you have the time."

"Unfortunately, I have not. But these specimens are so well labelled and classified that they hardly need your personal explanation. If I should be able to look in to-morrow, I presume that there would be no objection to my glancing over them?"

"None at all. You are most welcome. The place will, of course, he shut up, Mrs. Saunders is in the basement up to four o'clock and would let you in with her key."

"Well, I happen to be clear to-morrow afternoon. If you would say a word to Mrs. Saunders it would be quite in order. By the way, who is your house-agent?"

Our client was amazed at the sudden question.

"Holloway and Steele, in the Edgware Road. But why?"

"I am a bit of an archæologist myself when it comes to houses," said Holmes, laughing. "I was wondering if this was Queen Anne or Georgian."

"Georgian, beyond doubt."

"Really. I should have thought a little earlier. However, it is easily ascertained. Well, good-bye, Mr. Garrideb, and may you have every success in your Birmingham journey."

The house-agent's was close by, but we found that it was closed for the day, so we made our way back to Baker Street. It was not till after dinner that Holmes reverted to the subject.

"Our little problem draws to a close," said he. "No doubt you have outlined the solution in your own mind."

"I can make neither head nor tail of it."

"The head is surely clear enough and the tail we should see to-morrow. Did you notice nothing curious about that advertisement?"

"I saw that the word 'plough' was misspelt."

"Oh, you did notice that, did you? Come, Watson, you improve all the time. Yes, it was bad English but good American. The printer had set it up as received. Then the buckboards. That is American also. And artesian wells are commoner with them than with us. It was a typical American advertisement, but purporting to be from an English firm. What do you make of that?"

"I can only suppose that this American lawyer put it in himself. What his object was I fail to understand."

"Well, there are alternative explanations. Anyhow, he wanted to get this good old fossil up to Birmingham. That is very clear. I might have told him that he was clearly going on a wild-goose chase, but, on second thoughts, it seemed better to clear the stage by letting him go. To-morrow, Watson—well, to-morrow will speak for itself."

Holmes was up and out early. When he returned at lunch-time I noticed that his face was very grave.

"This is a more serious matter than I had expected, Watson," said he. "It is fair to tell you so, though I know it will only be an additional reason to you for running your head into danger. I should know my Watson by now. But there *is* danger, and you should know it."

"Well, it is not the first we have shared, Holmes. I hope it may not be the last. What is the particular danger this time?"

"We are up against a very hard case. I have identified Mr. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law. He is none other than 'Killer' Evans, of sinister and murderous reputation."

"I fear I am none the wiser."

"Ah, it is not part of your profession to carry about a portable Newgate Calendar in you rmemory. I have been down to see friend Lestrade at the Yard. There may be an occasional want of imaginative intuition down there, but they lead the world for thoroughness and

method. I had an idea that we might get on the track of our American friend in their records. Sure enough, I found his chubby face smiling up at me from the Rogues' Portrait Gallery. James Winter, *alias* Morecroft, *alias* Killer Evans, was the inscription below." Holmes drew an envelope from his pocket. "I scribbled down a few points from his dossier. Aged forty-four. Native of Chicago. Known to have shot three men in the States. Escaped from penitentiary through political influence. Came to London in 1893. Shot a man over cards in a night club in the Waterloo Road in January, 1895. Man died, but he was shown to have been the aggressor in the row. Dead man was identified as Rodger Prescott, famous as forger and coiner in Chicago. Killer Evans released in 1901. Has been under police supervision since, but so far as known has led an honest life. Very dangerous man, usually carries arms and is prepared to use them. That is our bird, Watson—a sporting bird, as you must admit."

"But what is his game?"

"Well, it begins to define itself. I have been to the house-agents. Our client, as he told us, has been there five years. It was unlet for a year before then. The previous tenant was a gentleman at large named Waldron. Waldron's appearance was well remembered at the office. He had suddenly vanished and nothing more been heard of him. He was a tall, bearded man with very dark features. Now, Prescott, the man whom Killer Evans had shot, was, according to Scotland Yard, a tall, dark man with a beard. As a working hypothesis, I think we may take it that Prescott, the American criminal, used to live in the very room which our innocent friend now devotes to his museum. So at last we get a link, you see."

"And the next link?"

"Well, we must go now and look for that."

He took a revolver from the drawer and handed it to me.

"I have my old favourite with me. If our Wild West friend tries to live up to his nickname, we must be ready for him. I'll give you an hour for a siesta, Watson, and

then I think it will be time for our Ryder Street adventure."

It was just four o'clock when we reached the curious apartment of Nathan Garrideb. Mrs. Saunders, the caretaker, was about to leave, but she had no hesitation in admitting us, for the door was shut with a spring lock and Holmes promised to see that all was safe before we left. Shortly afterwards the outer door closed, her bonnet passed the bow window, and we knew that we were alone in the lower floor of the house. Holmes made a rapid examination of the premises. There was one cupboard in a dark corner which stood out a little from the wall. It was behind this that we eventually crouched, while Holmes in a whisper outlined his intentions.

"He wanted to get our amiable friend out of his room—that is very clear, and, as the collector never went out, it took some planning to do it. The whole of this Garrideb invention was apparently for no other end. I must say, Watson, that there is a certain devilish ingenuity about it, even if the queer name of the tenant did give him an opening which he could hardly have expected. He wove his plot with remarkable cunning."

"But what did he want?"

"Well, that is what we are here to find out. It has nothing whatever to do with our client, so far as I can read the situation. It is something connected with the man he murdered—the man who may have been his confederate in crime. There is some guilty secret in the room. That is how I read it. At first I thought our friend might have something in his collection more valuable than he knew—something worth the attention of a big criminal. But the fact that Rodger Prescott of evil memory inhabited these rooms points to some deeper reason. Well, Watson, we can but possess our souls in patience and see what the hour may bring."

That hour was not long in striking. We crouched closer in the shadow as we heard the outer door open and shut. Then came the sharp, metallic snap of a key, and the American was in the room. He closed the door softly be-

hind him, took a sharp glance around him to see that all was safe, threw off his overcoat, and walked up to the central table with the brisk manner of one who knows exactly what he has to do and how to do it. He pushed the table to one side, tore up the square of carpet on which it rested, rolled it completely back, and then, drawing a jimmy from his inside pocket, he knelt down and worked vigorously upon the floor. Presently we heard the sound of sliding boards, and an instant later a square had opened in the planks. Killer Evans struck a match, lit a stump of candle, and vanished from our view.

Clearly our moment had come. Holmes touched my wrist as a signal, and together we stole across to the open trapdoor. Gently as we moved, however, the old floor must have creaked under our feet, for the head of our American, peering anxiously round, emerged suddenly from the open space. His face turned upon us with a glare of baffled rage, which gradually softened into a rather shamefaced grin as he realized that two pistols were pointed at his head.

"Well, well!" said he, coolly, as he scrambled to the surface. "I guess you have been one too many for me, Mr. Holmes. Saw through my game, I suppose, and played me for a sucker from the first. Well, sir, I hand it to you; you have me beat and——"

In an instant he had whisked out a revolver from his breast and had fired two shots. I felt a sudden hot sear as if a red-hot iron had been pressed to my thigh. There was a crash as Holmes' pistol came down on the man's head. I had a vision of him sprawling upon the floor with blood running down his face while Holmes rummaged him for weapons. Then my friend's wiry arms were round me and he was leading me to a chair.

"You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!"

It was worth a wound—it was worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one

and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.

"It's nothing, Holmes. It's a mere scratch."

He had ripped up my trousers with his pocket-knife.

"You are right," he cried, with an immense sigh of relief. "It is quite superficial." His face set like flint as he glared at our prisoner, who was sitting up with a dazed face. "By the Lord, it is as well for you. If you had killed Watson, you would not have got out of this room alive. Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?"

He had nothing to say for himself. He only lay and scowled. I leaned on Holmes's arm, and together we looked down into the small cellar which had been disclosed by the secret flap. It was still illuminated by the candle which Evans had taken down with him. Our eyes fell upon a mass of rusted machinery, great rolls of papers, a litter of bottles, and, neatly arranged upon a small table, a number of neat little bundles.

"A printing press—a counterfeiter's outfit," said Holmes.

"Yes, sir," said our prisoner, staggering slowing to his feet and then sinking into the chair. "The greatest counterfeiter London ever saw. That's Prescott's machine, and those bundles on the table are two thousand of Prescott's notes worth a hundred each and fit to pass anywhere. Help yourselves, gentlemen. Call it a deal and let me beat it."

Holmes laughed.

"We don't do things like that, Mr. Evans. There is no bolt-hole for you in this country. You shot this man Prescott, did you not?"

"Yes, sir, and got five years for it, though it was he who pulled on me. Five years—when I should have had a medal the size of a soup plate. No living man could tell a Prescott from a Bank of England, and if I hadn't put him out he would have flooded London with them. I was the only one in the world who knew where he made them. Can you wonder that I wanted to get to the place? And

can you wonder that when I found this crazy boob of a bug-hunter with the queer name squatting right on the top of it, and never quitting his room, I had to do the best I could to shift him? Maybe I would have been wiser if I had put him away. It would have been easy enough, but I'm a soft-hearted guy that can't begin shooting unless the other man has a gun also. But say, Mr. Holmes, what have I done wrong, anyhow? I've not used this plant. I've not hurt this old stiff. Where do you get me?"

"Only attempted murder, so far as I can see," said Holmes. "But that's not our job. They take that at the next stage. What we wanted at present was just your sweet self. Please give the Yard a call, Watson. It won't be entirely unexpected."

So those were the facts about Killer Evans and his remarkable invention of the three Garridebs. We heard later that our poor old friend never got over the shock of his dissipated dreams. When his castle in the air fell down, it buried him beneath the ruins. He was last heard of at a nursing-home in Brixton. It was a glad day at the Yard when the Prescott outfit was discovered, for, though they knew that it existed, they had never been able, after the death of the man, to find out where it was. Evans had indeed done great service and caused several worthy C.I.D. men to sleep the sounder, for the counterfeiter stands in a class by himself as a public danger. They would willingly have subscribed to that soup-plate medal of which the criminal had spoken, but an unappreciative Bench took a less favourable view, and the Killer returned to those shades from which he had just emerged.

A. CONAN DOYLE

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MAZARIN STONE

It was pleasant to Dr. Watson to find himself once more in the untidy room of the first floor in Baker Street which had been the starting-point of so many remarkable adventures. He looked round him at the scientific charts upon the wall, the acid-charred bench of chemicals, the violin-case leaning in the corner, the coal-scuttle, which contained of old the pipes and tobacco. Finally, his eyes came round to the fresh and smiling face of Billy, the young but very wise and tactful page, who had helped a little to fill up the gap of loneliness and isolation which surrounded the saturnine figure of the great detective.

"It all seems very unchanged, Billy. You don't change, either. I hope the same can be said of him?"

Billy glanced, with some solicitude, at the closed door of the bedroom.

"I think he's in bed and asleep," he said.

It was seven in the evening of a lovely summer's day, but Dr. Watson was sufficiently familiar with the irregularity of his old friend's hours to feel no surprise at the idea.

"That means a case, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; he is very hard at it just now. I'm frightened for his health. He gets paler and thinner, and he eats nothing. 'When will you be pleased to dine, Mr. Holmes?' Mrs. Hudson asked. 'Seven-thirty, the day after to-morrow,' said he. You know his way when he is keen on a case."

"Yes, Billy, I know."

(From "The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes," by A. Conan Doyle. Copyright, 1927, by Doubleday, Doran & Company, New York, and by John Murray, London, England.)

"He's following someone. Yesterday he was out as a workman looking for a job. To-day he was an old woman. Fairly took me in, he did, and I ought to know his ways by now." Billy pointed with a grin to a very baggy parasol which leaned against the sofa. "That's part of the old woman's outfit," he said.

"But what is it all about, Billy?"

Billy sank his voice, as one who discusses great secrets of State. "I don't mind telling you, sir, but it should go no farther. It's this case of the Crown diamond."

"What—the hundred-thousand-pound burglary?"

"Yes, sir. They must get it back, sir. Why, we had the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary both sitting on that very sofa. Mr. Holmes was very nice to them. He soon put them at their ease and promised he would do all he could. Then there is Lord Cantlemere——"

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir; you know what that means. He's a stiff 'un, sir, if I may say so. I can get along with the Prime Minister, and I've nothing against the Home Secretary, who seemed a civil, obliging sort of man, but I can't stand his lordship. Neither can Mr. Holmes, sir. You see, he don't believe in Mr. Holmes and he was against employing him. He'd *rather* he failed."

"And Mr. Holmes knows it?"

"Mr. Holmes always knows whatever there is to know."

"Well, we'll hope he won't fail and that Lord Cantlemere will be confounded. But I say, Billy, what is that curtain for across the window?"

"Mr. Holmes had it put up there three days ago. We've got something funny behind it."

Billy advanced and drew away the drapery which screened the alcove of the bow window.

Dr. Watson could not restrain a cry of amazement. There was a facsimile of his old friend, dressing-gown and all, the face turned three-quarters toward the window and downwards, as though reading an invisible book, while the body was sunk deep in an arm-chair. Billy detached the head and held it in the air.

"We put it at different angles, so that it may seem more life-like. I wouldn't dare touch it if the blind were not down. But when it's up you can see this from across the way."

"We used something of the sort once before."

"Before my time," said Billy. He drew the window curtains apart and looked out into the street. "There are folk who watch us from over yonder. I can see a fellow now at the window. Have a look for yourself."

Watson had taken a step forward when the bedroom door opened, and the long, thin form of Holmes emerged, his face pale and drawn, but his step and bearing as active as ever. With a single spring he was at the window, and had drawn the blind once more.

"That will do, Billy," said he. "You were in danger of your life then, my boy, and I can't do without you just yet. Well, Watson, it is good to see you in your old quarters once again. You come at a critical moment."

"So I gather."

"You can go, Billy. That boy is a problem, Watson. How far am I justified in allowing him to be in danger?"

"Danger of what, Holmes?"

"Of sudden death. I'm expecting something this evening."

"Expecting what?"

"To be murdered, Watson."

"No, no; you are joking, Holmes!"

"Even my limited sense of humour could evolve a better joke than that. But we may be comfortable in the meantime, may we not? Is alcohol permitted? The gasogene and cigars are in the old place. Let me see you once more in the customary arm-chair. You have not, I hope, learned to despise my pipe and my lamentable tobacco? It has to take the place of food these days."

"But why not eat?"

"Because the faculties become refined when you starve them. Why, surely, as a doctor, my dear Watson, you must admit that what your digestion gains in the way of blood supply is so much loss to the brain. I am a

brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix. Therefore, it is the brain I must consider."

"But this danger, Holmes?"

"Ah, yes; in case it should come off, it would perhaps be as well that you should burden your memory with the name and address of the murderer. You can give it to Scotland Yard, with my love and a parting blessing. Sylvius is the name—Count Negretto Sylvius. Write it down, man, write it down! 136 Moorside Gardens, N.W. Got it?"

Watson's honest face was twitching with anxiety. He knew only too well the immense risks taken by Holmes, and was well aware that what he said was more likely to be under-statement than exaggeration. Watson was always the man of action, and he rose to the occasion.

"Count me in, Holmes. I have nothing to do for a day or two."

"Your morals don't improve, Watson. You have added fibbing to your other vices. You bear every sign of the busy medical man, with calls on him every hour."

"Not such important ones. But can't you have this fellow arrested?"

"Yes, Watson, I could. That's what worries him so."

"But why don't you?"

"Because I don't know where the diamond is."

"Ah! Billy told me—the missing Crown jewel!"

"Yes, the great yellow Mazarin stone. I've cast my net and I have my fish. But I have not got the stone. What is the use of taking *them?* We can make the world a better place by laying them by the heels. But that is not what I am out for. It's the stone I want."

"And is this Count Sylvius one of your fish?"

"Yes, and he's a shark. He bites. The other is Sam Merton, the boxer. Not a bad fellow, Sam, but the Count has used him. Sam's not a shark. He is a great big silly bull-headed gudgeon. But he is flopping about in my net all the same."

"Where is this Count Sylvius?"

"I've been at his very elbow all the morning. You've

seen me as an old lady, Watson. I was never more convincing. He actually picked up my parasol for me once. 'By your leave, madame,' said he—half-Italian, you know, and with the Southern graces of manner when in the mood, but a devil incarnate in the other mood. Life is full of whimsical happenings, Watson."

"It might have been tragedy."

"Well, perhaps it might. I followed him to old Straubenzee's workship in the Minories. Straubenzee made the air-gun—a very pretty bit of work, as I understand, and I rather fancy it is in the opposite window at the present moment. Have you seen the dummy? Of course, Billy showed it to you. Well, it may get a bullet through its beautiful head at any moment. Ah, Billy, what is it?"

The boy had reappeared in the room with a card upon a tray. Holmes glanced at it with raised eyebrows and an amused smile.

"The man himself. I had hardly expected this. Grasp the nettle, Watson! A man of nerve. Possibly you have heard of his reputation as a shooter of big game. It would indeed be a triumphant ending to his excellent sporting record if he added me to his bag. This is a proof that he feels my toe very close behind his heel."

"Send for the police."

"I probably shall. But not just yet. Would you glance carefully out of the window, Watson, and see if anyone is hanging about in the street?"

Watson looked warily round the edge of the curtain.

"Yes, there is one rough fellow near the door."

"That will be Sam Merton—the faithful but rather fatuous Sam. Where is this gentleman, Billy?"

"In the waiting-room, sir."

"Show him up when I ring."

"Yes, sir."

"If I am not in the room, show him in all the same."

"Yes, sir."

Watson waited until the door was closed, and then he turned earnestly to his companion.

"Look here, Holmes, this is simply impossible. This is

a desperate man, who sticks at nothing. He may have come to murder you."

"I should not be surprised."

"I insist upon staying with you."

"You would be horribly in the way."

"In *his* way?"

"No, my dear fellow—in my way."

"Well, I can't possibly leave you."

"Yes, you can, Watson. And you will, for you have never failed to play the game. I am sure you will play it to the end. This man has come for his own purpose, but he may stay for mine." Holmes took out his notebook and scribbled a few lines. "Take a cab to Scotland Yard and give this to Youghal of the C.I.D. Come back with the police. The fellow's arrest will follow."

"I'll do that with joy."

"Before you return I may have just time enough to find out where the stone is." He touched the bell. "I think we will go out through the bedroom. This second exit is exceedingly useful. I rather want to see my shark without his seeing me, and I have, as you will remember, my own way of doing it."

It was, therefore, an empty room into which Billy, a minute later, ushered Count Sylvius. The famous game-shot, sportsman, and man-about-town was a big, swarthy fellow, with a formidable dark moustache, shading a cruel, thin-lipped mouth, and surmounted by a long, curved nose, like the beak of an eagle. He was well dressed, but his brilliant necktie, shining pin, and glittering rings were flamboyant in their effect. As the door closed behind him he looked round him with fierce, startled eyes, like one who suspects a trap at every turn. Then he gave a violent start as he saw the impassive head and the collar of the dressing gown which projected above the arm-chair in the window. At first his expression was one of pure amazement. Then the light of a horrible hope gleamed in his dark, murderous eyes. He took one more glance round to see that there were no witnesses, and then, on tiptoe, his thick stick half raised, he approached the silent

figure. He was crouching for his final spring and blow when a cool, sardonic voice greeted him from the open bedroom door:

"Don't break it, Count! Don't break it!"

The assassin staggered back, amazement in his convulsed face. For an instant he half raised his loaded cane once more, as if he would turn his violence from the effigy to the original; but there was something in that steady grey eye and mocking smile which caused his hand to sink to his side.

"It's a pretty little thing," said Holmes, advancing towards the image. "Tavernier, the French modeller, made it. He is as good at waxworks as your friend Straubenzee is at air-guns."

"Air-guns, sir! What do you mean?"

"Put your hat and stick on the side-table. Thank you! Pray take a seat. Would you care to put your revolver out also? Oh, very good, if you prefer to sit upon it. Your visit is really most opportune, for I wanted badly to have a few minutes' chat with you."

The Count scowled, with heavy, threatening eyebrows.

"I, too, wished to have some words with you, Holmes. That is why I am here. I won't deny that I intended to assault you just now."

Holmes swung his leg on the edge of the table.

"I rather gathered that you had some idea of the sort in your head," said he. "But why these personal attentions?"

"Because you have gone out of your way to annoy me. Because you have put your creatures upon my track."

"My creatures! I assure you no!"

"Nonsense! I have had them followed. Two can play at that game, Holmes."

"It is a small point, Count Sylvius, but perhaps you would kindly give me my prefix when you address me. You can understand that, with my routine of work, I should find myself on familiar terms with half the rogues' gallery, and you will agree that exceptions are invidious."

"Well, *Mr.* Holmes, then."

"Excellent! But I assure you you are mistaken about my alleged agents."

Count Sylvius laughed contemptuously.

"Other people can observe as well as you. Yesterday there was an old sporting man. To-day it was an elderly woman. They held me in view all day."

"Really, sir, you compliment me. Old Baron Dowson said the night before he was hanged that in my case what the law had gained the stage had lost. And now you give my little impersonations your kindly praise!"

"It was you—you yourself?"

Holmes shrugged his shoulders. "You can see in the corner the parasol which you so politely handed to me in the Minories before you began to suspect."

"If I had known, you might never——"

"Have seen this humble home again. I was well aware of it. We all have neglected opportunities to deplore. As it happens, you did not know, so here we are!"

The Count's knotted brows gathered more heavily over his menacing eyes. "What you say only makes the matter worse. It was not your agents, but your play-acting, busybody self! You admit that you have dogged me. Why?"

"Come now, Count. You used to shoot lions in Algeria."

"Well?"

"But why?"

"Why? The sport—the excitement—the danger!"

"And, no doubt, to free the country from a pest?"

"Exactly!"

"My reasons in a nutshell!"

The Count sprang to his feet, and his hand involuntarily moved back to his hip-pocket.

"Sit down, sir, sit down! There was another, more practical, reason. I want that yellow diamond!"

Count Sylvius lay back in his chair with an evil smile.

"Upon my word!" said he.

"You knew that I was after you for that. The real reason why you are here to-night is to find out how much

I know about the matter and how far my removal is absolutely essential. Well, I should say that, from your point of view, it *is* absolutely essential, for I know all about it, save only one thing, which you are about to tell me."

"Oh, indeed! And, pray, what is this missing fact?"

"Where the Crown diamond now is."

The Count looked sharply at his companion. "Oh, you want to know that, do you? How the devil should I be able to tell you where it is?"

"You can, and you will."

"Indeed!"

"You can't bluff me, Count Sylvius." Holmes's eyes, as he gazed at him, contracted and lightened until they were like two menacing points of steel. "You are absolute plate-glass. I see to the very back of your mind."

"Then, of course, you see where the diamond is!"

Holmes clapped his hands with amusement, and then pointed a derisive finger. "Then you do know. You have admitted it!"

"I admit nothing."

"Now, Count, if you will be reasonable, we can do business. If not, you will get hurt."

Count Sylvius threw up his eyes to the ceiling. "And you talk about bluff!" said he.

Holmes looked at him thoughtfully, like a master chess-player who meditates his crowning move. Then he threw open the table drawer and drew out a squat notebook.

"Do you know what I keep in this book?"

"No, sir, I do not!"

"You!"

"Me?"

"Yes, sir, *you!* You are all here—every action of your vile and dangerous life."

"Damn you, Holmes!" cried the Count, with blazing eyes. "There are limits to my patience!"

"It's all here, Count. The real facts as to the death of old Mrs. Harold, who left you the Blymer estate, which you so rapidly gambled away."

"You are dreaming!"

"And the complete life history of Miss Minnie Warrender."

"Tut! You will make nothing of that!"

"Plenty more here, Count. Here is the robbery in the train-de-luxe to the Riviera on February 13, 1892. Here is the forged cheque in the same year on the Crédit Lyonnais."

"No; you're wrong there."

"Then I am right on the others! Now, Count, you are a card-player. When the other fellow has all the trumps, it saves time to throw down your hand."

"What has all this talk to do with the jewel of which you spoke?"

"Gently, Count. Restrain that eager mind! Let me get to the points in my own humdrum fashion. I have all this against you; but, above all, I have a clear case against both you and your fighting bully in the case of the Crown diamond."

"Indeed!"

"I have the cabman who took you to Whitehall and the cabman who brought you away. I have the Commissionaire who saw you near the case. I have Ikey Sanders, who refused to cut it up for you. Ikey has peached, and the game is up."

The veins stood out on the Count's forehead. His dark, hairy hands were clenched in a convulsion of restrained emotion. He tried to speak, but the words would not shape themselves.

"That's the hand I play from," said Holmes. "I put it all upon the table. But one card is missing. It's the King of Diamonds. I don't know where the stone is."

"You never shall know."

"No? Now, be reasonable, Count. Consider the situation. You are going to be locked up for twenty years. So is Sam Merton. What good are you going to get out of your diamond? None in the world. But if you hand it over—well, I'll compound a felony. We don't want you or Sam. We want the stone. Give that up, and so far as

I am concerned you can go free so long as you behave yourself in the future. If you make another slip—well, it will be the last. But this time my commission is to get the stone, not you."

"But if I refuse?"

"Why, then—alas!—it must be you and not the stone."

Billy had appeared in answer to a ring.

"I think, Count, that it would be as well to have your friend Sam at this conference. After all, his interests should be represented. Billy, you will see a large and ugly gentleman outside the front door. Ask him to come up."

"If he won't come, sir?"

"No violence, Billy. Don't be rough with him. If you tell him that Count Sylvius wants him he will certainly come."

"What are you going to do now?" asked the Count, as Billy disappeared.

"My friend Watson was with me just now. I told him that I had a shark and a gudgeon in my net; now I am drawing the net and up they come together."

The Count had risen from his chair, and his hand was behind his back. Holmes held something half protruding from the pocket of his dressing-gown."

"You won't die in your bed, Holmes."

"I have often had the same idea. Does it matter very much? After all, Count, your own exit is more likely to be perpendicular than horizontal. But these anticipations of the future are morbid. Why not give ourselves up to the unrestrained enjoyment of the present?"

A sudden wild-beast light sprang up in the dark, menacing eyes of the master criminal. Holmes's figure seemed to grow taller as he grew tense and ready.

"It is no use your fingering your revolver, my friend," he said, in a quiet voice. "You know perfectly well that you dare not use it, even if I gave you time to draw it. Nasty, noisy things, revolvers, Count. Better stick to air-guns. Ah! I think I hear the fairy footstep of your estimable partner. Good day, Mr. Merton. Rather dull in the street, is it not?"

The prize-fighter, a heavily built young man with a stupid, obstinate, slab-sided face, stood awkwardly at the door, looking about him with a puzzled expression. Holmes's debonair manner was a new experience, and though he vaguely felt that it was hostile, he did not know how to counter it. He turned to his more astute comrade for help.

"What's the game now, Count? What's this fellow want? What's up?" His voice was deep and raucous.

The Count shrugged his shoulders, and it was Holmes who answered.

"If I may put it in a nutshell, Mr. Merton, I should say it was *all* up."

The boxer still addressed his remarks to his associate.

"Is this cove trying to be funny, or what? I'm not in the funny mood myself."

"No, I expect not," said Holmes. "I think I can promise you that you will feel even less humorous as the evening advances. Now, look here, Count Sylvius. I'm a busy man and I can't waste time. I'm going into that bedroom. Pray make yourself quite at home in my absence. You can explain to your friend how the matter lies without the restraint of my presence, I shall try over the Hoffmann Barcarole upon my violin. In five minutes I shall return for your final answer. You quite grasp the alternative, do you not? Shall we take you, or shall we have the stone?"

Holmes withdrew, picking up his violin from the corner as he passed. A few moments later the long-drawn, wailing notes of that most haunting of tunes came faintly through the closed door of the bedroom.

"What is it, then?" asked Merton anxiously, as his companion turned to him. "Does he know about the stone?"

"He knows a damned sight too much about it. I'm not sure that he doesn't know all about it."

"Good Lord!" The boxer's sallow face turned a shade whiter.

"Ikey Sanders has split on us."

"He has, has he? I'll do him down a thick 'un for that if I swing for it."

"That won't help us much. We've got to make up our minds what to do."

"Half a mo'," said the boxer, looking suspiciously at the bedroom door. "He's a leary cove that wants watching. I suppose he's not listening?"

"How can he be listening with that music going?"

"That's right. Maybe somebody's behind a curtain. Too many curtains in this room." As he looked round he suddenly saw for the first time the effigy in the window, and stood staring and pointing, too amazed for words.

"Tut! it's only a dummy," said the Count.

"A fake, is it? Well, strike me! Madame Tussaud ain't in it. It's the living spit of him, gown and all. But them curtains, Count!"

"Oh, confound the curtains! We are wasting our time, and there is none too much. He can lag us over this stone."

"The deuce he can!"

"But he'll let us slip if we only tell him where the swag is."

"What! Give it up? Give up a hundred thousand quid?"

"It's one or the other."

Merton scratched his short-cropped pate.

"He's alone in there. Let's do him in. If his light were out we should have nothing to fear."

The Count shook his head.

"He is armed and ready. If we shot him we could hardly get away in a place like this. Besides, it's likely enough that the police know whatever evidence he has got. Hallo! What was that?"

There was a vague sound which seemed to come from the window. Both men sprang round, but all was quiet. Save for the one strange figure seated in the chair, the room was certainly empty.

"Something in the street," said Merton. "Now look here, gov'nor, you've got the brains. Surely you can think a way out of it. If slugging is no use then it's up to you."

"I've fooled better men than he," the Count answered. "The stone is here in my secret pocket. I take no chances leaving it about. It can be out of England to-night and cut into four pieces in Amsterdam before Sunday. He knows nothing of Van Seddar."

"I thought Van Seddar was going next week."

"He *was*. But now he must get off by the next boat. One or other of us must slip round with the stone to Lime Street and tell him."

"But the false bottom ain't ready."

"Well, he must take it as it is and chance it. There's not a moment to lose." Again, with the sense of danger which becomes an instinct with the sportsman, he paused and looked hard at the window. Yes, it was surely from the street that the faint sound had come.

"As to Holmes," he continued, "we can fool him easily enough. You see, the damned fool won't arrest us if he can get the stone. Well, we'll promise him the stone. We'll put him on the wrong track about it, and before he finds that it *is* the wrong track it will be in Holland and we out of the country."

"That sounds good to me!" cried Sam Merton, with a grin.

"You go on and tell the Dutchman to get a move on him. I'll see this sucker and fill him up with a bogus confession. I'll tell him that the stone is in Liverpool. Confound that whining music; it gets on my nerves! By the time he finds it isn't in Liverpool it will be in quarters and we on the blue water. Come back here, out of a line with that keyhole. Here is the stone."

"I wonder you dare carry it."

"Where could I have it safer? If we could take it out of Whitehall someone else could surely take it out of my lodgings."

"Let's have a look at it."

Count Sylvius cast a somewhat unflattering glance at his associate, and disregarded the unwashed hand which was extended towards him.

"What—d'ye think I'm going to snatch it off you? See here, mister, I'm getting a bit tired of your ways."

"Well, well; no offence, Sam. We can't afford to quarrel. Come over to the window if you want to see the beauty properly. Now hold it to the light! Here!"

"Thank you!"

With a single spring Holmes had leaped from the dummy's chair and had grasped the precious jewel. He held it now in one hand, while his other pointed a revolver at the Count's head. The two villains staggered back in utter amazement. Before they had recovered Holmes had pressed the electric bell.

"No violence, gentlemen—no violence, I beg of you! Consider the furniture! It must be very clear to you that your position is an impossible one. The police are waiting below."

The Count's bewilderment overmastered his rage and fear.

"But how the deuce——?" he gasped.

"Your surprise is very natural. You are not aware that a second door from my bedroom leads behind that curtain. I fancied that you must have heard me when I displaced the figure, but luck was on my side. It gave me a chance of listening to your racy conversation which would have been painfully constrained had you been aware of my presence."

The Count gave a gesture of resignation.

"We give you best, Holmes. I believe you are the devil himself."

"Not far from him, at any rate," Holmes answered, with a polite smile.

Sam Merton's slow intellect had only gradually appreciated the situation. Now, as the sound of heavy steps came from the stairs outside, he broke silence at last.

"A fair cop!" said he. "But, I say, what about that bloomin' fiddle! I hear it yet."

"Tut, tut!" Holmes answered. "You are perfectly right. Let it play! These modern gramophones are a remarkable invention."

There was an inrush of police, the handcuffs clicked and the criminals were led to the waiting cab. Watson lingered with Holmes, congratulating him upon this fresh leaf added to his laurels. Once more their conversation was interrupted by the imperturbable Billy with his card-tray.

"Lord Cantlemere, sir."

"Show him up, Billy. This is the eminent peer who represents the very highest interests," said Holmes. "He is an excellent and loyal person, but rather of the old régime. Shall we make him unbend? Dare we venture upon a slight liberty? He knows, we may conjecture, nothing of what has occurred."

The door opened to admit a thin, austere figure with a hatchet face and drooping mid-Victorian whiskers of a glossy blackness which hardly corresponded with the rounded shoulders and feeble gait. Holmes advanced affably, and shook an unresponsive hand.

"How-do-you-do, Lord Cantlemere? It is chilly, for the time of year, but rather warm indoors. May I take your overcoat?"

"No, I thank you; I will not take it off."

Holmes laid his hand insistently upon the sleeve.

"Pray allow me! My friend Dr. Watson would assure you that these changes of temperature are most insidious."

His lordship shook himself free with some impatience.

"I am quite comfortable, sir. I have no need to stay. I have simply looked in to know how your self-appointed task was progressing."

"It is difficult—very difficult."

"I feared that you would find it so."

There was a distinct sneer in the old courtier's words and manner.

"Every man finds his limitations, Mr. Holmes, but at least it cures us of the weakness of self-satisfaction."

"Yes, sir, I have been much perplexed."

"No doubt."

"Especially upon one point. Possibly you could help me upon it?"

"You apply for my advice rather late in the day. I thought that you had your own all-sufficient methods. Still, I am ready to help you."

"You see, Lord Cantlemere, we can no doubt frame a case against the actual thieves."

"When you have caught them."

"Exactly. But the question is—how shall we proceed against the receiver?"

"Is this not rather premature?"

"It is as well to have our plans ready. Now, what would you regard as final evidence against the receiver?"

"The actual possession of the stone."

"You would arrest him upon that?"

"Most undoubtedly."

Holmes seldom laughed, but he got as near it as his old friend Watson could remember.

"In that case, my dear sir, I shall be under the painful necessity of advising your arrest."

Lord Cantlemere was very angry. Some of the ancient fires flickered up into his sallow cheeks.

"You take a great liberty, Mr. Holmes. In fifty years of official life I cannot recall such a case. I am a busy man, sir, engaged upon important affairs, and I have no time or taste for foolish jokes. I may tell you frankly, sir, that I have never been a believer in your powers, and that I have always been of the opinion that the matter was far safer in the hands of the regular police force. Your conduct confirms all my conclusions. I have the honour, sir, to wish you good evening."

Holmes had swiftly changed his position and was between the peer and the door.

"One moment, sir," said he. "To actually go off with the Mazarin stone would be a more serious offence than to be found in temporary possession of it."

"Sir, this is intolerable! Let me pass."

"Put your hand in the right-hand pocket of your overcoat."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Come—come; do what I ask."

An instant later the amazed peer was standing, blinking and stammering, with the great yellow stone on his shaking palm.

"What! What! How is this, Mr. Holmes?"

"Too bad, Lord Cantlemere, too bad!" cried Holmes. "My old friend here will tell you that I have an impish habit of practical joking. Also that I can never resist a dramatic situation. I took the liberty—the very great liberty, of putting the stone into your pocket at the beginning of our interview."

The old peer stared from the stone to the smiling face before him.

"Sir, I am bewildered. But—yes—it is indeed the Mazarin stone. We are greatly your debtors, Mr. Holmes. Your sense of humour may, as you admit, be somewhat perverted, and its exhibition remarkably untimely, but at least I withdraw any reflection I have made upon your amazing professional powers. But how——"

"The case is but half finished; the details can wait. No doubt, Lord Cantlemere, your pleasure in telling of this successful result in the exalted circle to which you return will be some small atonement for my practical joke. Billy, you will show his lordship out, and tell Mrs. Hudson that I should be glad if she would send up dinner for two as soon as possible."

VINCENT STARRETT

MISSING MEN

My friend Lavender dwelt up four flights of steps, a wearisome climb unless one were in training. Only the little landings at the end of every flight kept me from perishing of thirst and fatigue on more than one ascent. So at least I told Lavender. The journey offered no difficulties to that agile young man himself. The trouble with me was that I inclined toward—well, stoutness.

"The rooms are comfortable," he would reply to my protests, "the windows afford an excellent view of an interesting corner of town, and the stairs are at once a protection and a blessing. The exercise I get in going up and down is distinctly beneficial, while four flights are sufficiently formidable to daunt bores and any but very determined clients and friends. Thus my practice is kept within reasonable bounds, my bank account is not the envy of the criminal class, and my circle of intimates does not overflow the social space at my disposal. Besides, the rooms are cheap."

The really important thing about Lavender's rooms was their convenience to transportation. Overlooking a minor business section, not too far from the Chicago Loop to be remote, the windows fronted north and west and beneath them to the north actually lay an elevated railroad station.

And Morley of the Central Detail, who patronized the "L," never found the place too far nor the steps too numerous. He was a clever young detective sergeant of the regular force who occasionally visited Lavender—clever chiefly in that he had sense enough to come to

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Lavender when he was in difficulties. One morning he came up the steps in an unusually bad humor, and that is part of the story I have to tell.

I had spent the night with Lavender and we had just finished breakfast, sent up by the restaurateur on the corner, when we heard Morley's footsteps and shortly beheld his morose countenance. He gave me a patronizing nod and shook hands warmly with Lavender.

We listened to his tale of woe. It seemed this time that one Peter Vanderdonck, a picture broker of some importance, had disappeared and that Morley was at his wit's end.

"Usually," said he, "there's some sort of a clue, but in this case there isn't anything that resembles one. I can't get started without a clue of some kind," he grumbled with pathetic profanity.

"Who reported him missing?" asked Lavender.

"His landlord," said Morley. "This Vanderdonck didn't send a check for his rent or something like that, so the guy—name's Giles—sends for the police. Thinks we're bill collectors, I guess. Damn silly in my opinion. Vanderdonck's probably just gone out of town and forgotten his rent."

Lavender grinned. "Is the usual 'foul play' suspected?"

"By the landlord and the newspapers, sure!" replied Morley with heavy irony. "There's nothing to indicate it. I've been through his office. No signs of a struggle. Nothing! Just as he must have left it. Not a thing moved. He might never even have used it, for all the evidence."

"Well," smiled Lavender, "murder doesn't *always* occur in a man's office. It's conceivable that a man may be killed in the street or in his home."

"Sure," agreed the detective. "I'm no fool. But where do I start when there ain't a clue? Nobody seems to know Vanderdonck but this Giles person, and nobody seems to know where he lives or whether he's got relatives or when he was last seen. It's just a blank wall."

"A blankety-blank wall, evidently," observed Lavender. "Well Morley, I don't know what you expect me to do.

I can't reach into my vest pocket and pull out the missing man. Wish I could! I'm going down town this afternoon though, and I'll look over this fellow's rooms with you if that's what you want. Give me the address, and let's say two o'clock."

He smiled and picked up a morning newspaper.

"By the way, Morley," he continued, "I hope an epidemic of disappearances is not about to begin. There are two others recorded in this morning's paper, and your case makes three."

Morley looked suspicious, as though he thought his leg was being pulled.

"I didn't notice 'em," he admitted.

"Charles Merritt is one of them. Know him? Rather well known and popular comedian. He was playing in the 'Tinfoil Revue.' He didn't show up at the theatre a few nights ago, or at least, nobody seems to have seen him. And nobody missed him until his first cue, which, seems strange. When he didn't respond, of course everybody missed him. He wasn't to be found and there was some excitement before the difficulty could be straightened out. Eventually they went ahead without him. The case is several days old but the press has just got hold of it. The theatre tried to keep it quiet. A queer case, don't you think?"

"Drunk!" declared Morley without hesitation. "Who's the other fellow?"

"It's not a fellow, it's a woman," replied Lavender. "A Mrs.—Mrs.—" he referred to the paper—"Mrs. Jameson of Rogers Park. Nice little suburban widow. She went shopping yesterday morning and didn't come home."

"In a hospital somewhere," asserted Morley promptly. "Run down, unconscious, and can't tell who she is. She'll be found before night."

Lavender sighed whimsically.

"It's uncanny the way you solve these mysteries, Morley," he said. "I wish I could do it in twice the time! Well, well, I'm not trying to suggest that there is any

connection between your case and these others. I'll see you at two."

He cocked an eye at me when our visitor had departed.

"The worst of it is, Lavender," I said, "he's probably right about one or both of those cases. One case *does* resemble another very closely, for the most part, and the obvious solution is often enough the correct one as you yourself told me."

"True," agreed my friend. "He may even be right about his own case. This Vanderdonck may have gone out of town very innocently, as Morley suggests. It's because it is so nearly always the expected that happens, in spite of the old maxim, that the police are on the whole a successful body of men. But, hello! Who's this?"

There had interrupted him a long ring at the doorbell.

"I hope, speaking of epidemics, that an epidemic of visitors is not about to begin," he continued. "No heavy steps this time, Gilruth, nor do they come two at a time. Light—rapid, but light. Chuck the dishes out of sight like a good fellow, Gilly. We are about to receive a woman."

"I have a feeling," said I, "that we are going to hear about another mysterious disappearance."

Lavender looked interested.

"The deuce you have! Do you know, Gilly, I also had one for a moment. But it is really too much to expect, right on the heels of Sergeant Morley."

The lady's knock fell upon the door panel.

"Nevertheless," whispered Lavender, "I am sure you are right."

He opened the door, and there entered Miss Shirley Minor.

Of course, we did not know her by sight or by instinct. We learned her name from her own lips some seconds after her appearance. We knew only in that first glance that an extraordinarily lovely young woman stood on the doorsill. Small, dark, alert. Her eyes, blue and anxious, looked from one to the other of us and settled upon

Lavender. A little smile at once eager and wistful played about her lips.

Then she said, "I am Shirley Minor. May I come in?"

The name meant nothing in the world to either of us but we smiled in unison, like a vaudeville duo.

"Of course," said Lavender, and I think I added, "Please do!"

"You had a visitor," she said, "so I waited until he had gone."

We seated her near the window where she at once exploded her bombshell. It was not quite unexpected.

"Mr. Lavender," she said piteously, "my father has disappeared!"

I looked at Lavender. He was looking at Shirley Minor. He was not in the least surprised nor excited. He merely smiled encouragingly at the girl.

"Yes?" he said. "And of course you want me to assist you to find him. I shall be happy to aid, of course. Just take a fresh grip on your nerves, Miss Minor, and tell us all about it. It is our business to help."

His calm interest and his cheerful smile had the desired effect. The anxiety faded from her eyes, and in a moment she smiled back at him.

"I'm afraid you will think me foolish, for after all father may have disappeared in a very usual manner. I mean, he may have gone away for a little while without bothering to leave word. Just the same I am anxious. You see, I have been away for some time myself. Only yesterday I returned from New York where I have been for some months. Father is hardly a notable correspondent, but I did hear from him once in a while, just a note to say that he was well. He always hated to write letters. I wrote reams to him, of course. Yesterday when I returned I found my three last letters to him in the mailbox. Apparently he hadn't been home to receive them. And I hadn't heard from him before I left New York for nearly two weeks."

"Was he expecting you to return?" asked Lavender, still cheerful.

"No, he wasn't," admitted Miss Minor with an air of guilt. "You see, I was somewhat anxious about not hearing from father, but not actually alarmed. I supposed that he didn't feel like writing. But in the background of my thought there was a slight fear that perhaps he was ill. I knew that if I wired that I was coming home and he was ill, he would wire back to stop me. That's his way, he doesn't like to be fussed over. So as I was tired of New York anyway I just thought I'd come home and surprise him."

"When did he expect you to return?"

"Well, not for another month at least, I'm afraid."

"And your mother——?"

"My mother is dead," said Miss Minor.

"I see! Your father, I fancy, is Cyril Minor? I thought so. Well, Miss Minor, you are probably alarming yourself about nothing in particular. Inasmuch as he did not expect you to return there was no reason why he should not leave town for a while, if it occurred to him. Still you probably did well to come to me. If anything has happened it is well to know about it early, isn't it? You have no idea where he might have gone, supposing him to have left town for a visit?"

"None in the world. His interests were all in Chicago, in recent years anyway; in his home and his club. Except for an old aunt up in Canada, I don't believe he has a relative in the world, other than me."

"Most men have friends," said Lavender, "and if I remember your father's reputation, he had no enemies. You haven't been to the police, I suppose?"

Miss Minor had not.

"Good," nodded Lavender. "Don't bother them just now. Leave the matter in my hands for a time. Probably you'll hear from your father when your mail is forwarded from New York, but in any case don't worry. Now tell me something of your father's habits."

After considerable questioning it developed that Cyril Minor was quite a creature of habit, with a trail that ordinarily a blind man could follow. He arose late as a

rule, breakfasted at home, and went for a walk. His walk led him usually to his club, the Waldron, where he lunched and read the papers. Presumably he remained at the club during most of the afternoon, and dined there. He had no office of his own, for although only forty-four years of age, he had retired from business. A man of considerable wealth obviously, with wide interests that brought him a constant and comfortable flow of money without the necessity of desk labor. In the evening he often went to the theatre, usually alone, since he was a widower, and he reached his home about eleven o'clock or between eleven and twelve. Very seldom was he later than midnight.

It was a commendable and consequently prosy record.

"There were three of your letters, I understand, that he did not receive," continued Lavender, probing for a gleam of light. "About when would the first of them have been written?"

"About a week ago. I wrote pretty often."

"So that he may have been away for a week, possibly a little less. All right, Miss Minor, I'll make the proper inquiries and report as soon as I have anything to report. And be sure to let me know if you hear of anything."

I looked at Lavender when she had gone. "Well?" I said.

"Well what?"

"The fourth disappearance!" said I. "It does look like an epidemic, doesn't it?"

He smiled. "Well, yes, superficially. Of course it's nothing of the sort. People disappear every day, I'm sure, and most of them don't get a line in the papers. This looks significant to us because of Morley's visit and because of my remarks about the two cases mentioned by the press. Miss Minor's visit so immediately followed Morley's that the temptation to find a connection is natural. Natural, but romantic," he added dryly. "Which is not to say that both cases are not serious. They may be very serious indeed, and again they may be very

trifling and unimportant. At the moment I prefer not to reach conclusions."

He lighted a cigarette and lost himself in thought for a few minutes. Then, looking at the clock, he got quickly to his feet.

"Just the same, since I've undertaken this case and have promised Morley to have a look at *his* case, I must not waste time. But I'm bound to say, Gilly, that on the face of things I never knew two cases that promised less."

Even Lavender, however, was no prophet.

II

We drew a stiff though courteous blank at the Waldron. Without being outstandingly eager to aid us, the club staff was polite and answered what questions Lavender had to put. This was natural, for we had said nothing about Miss Minor's visit to us and the club attendants naturally wondered what our call portended. Lavender is a plausible person, however, and merely let it be known that he was anxious to get into touch with Cyril Minor, who was not to be found at his home.

Mr. Minor, it seemed, had not been seen about the club for a week. Yes, it was a bit unusual but not perhaps extraordinary. There was no mail waiting for him. He received very little mail at the club, however. None of his particular friends were in, at the moment. Perhaps Mr. Minor himself would be back before long. Who was he to be told had called?

As this latter suggestion was something more than a possibility Lavender penned a brief note, sealed it, and left it to await the return of the missing man. In it he advised Mr. Minor to get into immediate communication with his daughter who was at home and anxious about him.

"Whether the fellow is a good citizen or a scoundrel, I suppose he's fond of his daughter," remarked Lavender

as we left the building. "I would be," he added. "And now, Gilly, we are exactly where we began. I shall have to visit Miss Minor in her home apparently, and look over her father's papers if she will permit it. Meanwhile we are in the general neighborhood of Morley's difficulties, suppose we have a look at Vanderdonck's office."

"It's a long way to two o'clock," I reminded him.

"So it is," agreed Lavender, stepping out briskly. "The absence of Sergeant Morley at the scene of his failure will greatly expedite our own investigation, I am sure."

A few blocks lay between us and the building in part occupied by the picture broker's establishment. We covered them rapidly. A dingy building it was, too, when we had found it. A building occupied for the most part by second-rate lawyers and booking agents, with one creaking elevator and four flights of toilsome, reminiscent stairs. We took the elevator for choice and ascended to the third story where in time we came upon the dismal office of Peter Vanderdonck. The name was on the door. On the door also was a fly-specked card with the legend in black, "Back in an hour." No doubt it had been used for years; it looked as if it were never taken down. No doubt also it had been put up on the occasion of Peter Vanderdonck's last farewell to his office. Had he expected to be back in an hour, I wondered? Or had his going been voluntary and final? Or for the matter of that, had it been *involuntary* and final?

It was an old key-lock, typical of the building, and Lavender had hardly touched it with a little steel instrument that he carried when the door opened. Used to my friend and his ways, I was not at all shocked. I had watched him pick many a lock in my time, although I had never seen him pick one with greater ease.

There were two rooms within, an ante-room and an inner sanctum. The ante-room, into which we first penetrated, was soberly, even dingily, furnished with a table, a couch, three chairs, and a telephone. Some framed prints were on the walls, some books and magazines were on the table beside the telephone. It was all old but in good

enough taste, and it reminded me of a small doctor's anteroom more than anything else. I wondered why a picture broker should inhabit such a dull hole.

With a comprehensive glance Lavender pushed through into the inner chamber. To our surprise it was no more handsomely furnished than the outer room had been. A great safe stood alongside one wall, with the name "Peter Vanderdonck" upon it in letters of red and gold. There were a small rolltop desk standing open, a swivel chair, a small table, and a telephone extension. In a corner, quite unscreened, was a porcelain washstand, and in the closet we found towels—three of them, one of which was dirty. There were no pictures whatever on the walls, although there were marks to show where pictures once had hung, and there were screw holes in the floor near the window where evidently something once had been clamped to the floor. All in all it was an amazing office to be occupied by a "well known picture broker." Lavender thought so, too.

Besides the closet door there was one other. It was paneled with ground glass and was obviously another entrance, or exit, giving onto the other corridor of the building. No lettering appeared on it and the door was locked. There was no key.

I looked my distaste.

"Queer place, isn't it?" Lavender answered my glance. "I don't wonder that Morley was stumped. I begin to think better of this case than I do of my own, Gilly."

He picked the lock of the door leading to the second corridor and looked out. He tried the door on its hinges.

"Works well," said he. "I suppose Vanderdonck has the key, wherever Mr. Vanderdonck is! A place with two entrances and exits is always useful."

He examined the dirty towel hanging in the closet, carrying it to the light for a better scrutiny. Then he cocked an eye at the big safe. I knew that he was seriously considering a more serious pick-lock job than the earlier ones. Finally he walked over to the washstand and examined the bowl. He touched the porcelain with

his sensitive fingers, looked at his forefinger, sniffed it, and turned on the water.

"Doesn't run out very readily," he remarked at length. "A bit clogged, I fancy. And notice how the drops at the last cling to the sides of the bowl."

"Very interesting," I smiled, "but what do you gather from that?"

"I'd like to see the contents of that safe," he answered thoughtfully.

Once more putting temptation away from him, however, he turned his attention to the holes in the floor, then to the small desk. The latter yielded little. There was a quantity of stationery, letterheads and envelopes, all bearing the name of Peter Vanderdonck, and the top sheet and envelope of each pile was dusty save where a thumb had smeared the dust into a smudge.

"Morley's thumb," grunted Lavender, staccato.

In the meantime I devoted myself to an investigation of the anteroom. But the table drawer was empty and nothing offered but the books and magazines. In the heap of the latter was one newspaper a month old, which I resurrected and idly glanced over. Then I noticed that a paragraph had been ringed with a blue pencil mark and I read the notice. After which I carried it to Lavender.

"Do you suppose this is important?" I asked and handed him the paper.

He carefully read the marked paragraph and a quaint wrinkle appeared above the bridge of his nose.

"An interesting coincidence, at any rate," he said half to himself.

"A dramatic criticism——" I began.

"In which he happened to be interested? Just that, Gilly. But why was he interested, supposing Vanderdonck to have marked the paper? For that matter, why was he interested, supposing someone else to have marked the paper and sent it to him? Did you note the cast of characters?"

"Yes," I replied, "I did." Then an idea struck me, and I added with a smile, "But Charles Merritt's name

is not in the cast, Jimmie. You can't connect up *that* case."

"So you thought of the Merritt mystery, did you? Well, it's true that his name isn't here, but someone else's name is. The part of 'Mabel Greensleeve' is played, if you please, by Miss Sidney Kane. And who is Miss Sidney Kane, Gilly?"

"I don't know. Do you?"

"She is, although somewhat elderly, one of the bright and shining stars, I believe, of the 'Tinfoil Revue,' in which Charles Merritt played a character sketch until his disappearance."

I considered this in silence.

"It's pretty thin, Lavender," I said at length.

"Of course, it's thin! But she's there, and it's an interesting coincidence, as I remarked. In connection with the disappearance of Mr. Vanderdonck and the condition of his washstand, it's doubly interesting."

"His washstand?" I echoed feebly.

"And his towel," said Lavender.

A moment later his eye was again on the great safe against the wall.

"I'd give a cookie to see the contents of that thing," he observed thoughtfully. "But it's Morley's job after all, and if it's to be opened it must be his responsibility. I suspect the police are waiting for relatives to turn up."

Saying which, he strolled over to the safe and began to play with the knob. What would have happened had he continued, I have no idea, but he had barely begun when a key was inserted in the outer door, and Lavender desisted and rose to his feet.

"Morley. Ahead of time," I ventured.

But it was not Morley. There entered instead a little old man with a warty face, hooked nose, and wide mouth. These with his stooping shoulders and small beady eyes gave him a generally inferior presence that was offensive. The apparition looked from Lavender to me and back at Lavender.

"What are you doing here?" it barked.

"Mr. Giles, I believe?" responded Lavender with suave courtesy. "Your question is surprising, to say the least. I had supposed our investigation to have been undertaken by your desire and authority."

The extraordinary ability possessed by my friend to convey a false impression without falsehood always has been my envy and delight. The ironic purport of the remark quite bowled over the little man in the doorway.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I thought Sergeant Morley was in charge of the case."

"Sergeant Morley will be here at two," said Lavender icily. "But it's all right, Mr. Giles. Now that you are here perhaps you can give us some information."

"Anything at all, anything at all," stuttered Giles. He now appeared to be eager and able to solve any difficulty we might propound to him, including the riddle of the Sphinx.

"How long had Mr. Vanderdonck been a tenant of yours?"

"Two years, Sergeant——"

"Lieutenant!" I said severely. "Lieutenant Lavender!"

"I beg your pardon! Two years, Lieutenant Lavender."

Lavender threw me a venomous glance and proceeded. "He had never vanished this way before, of course?"

"He always paid his rent promptly, that's all I know," responded Giles. "He sent a check the first of every month. When it didn't come this month, or on the second or third, neither, I came over to see him. Hadn't seen him since he took the rooms. Well, he wasn't here and he hasn't been here since."

Lavender appeared to be shocked by this delinquency.

"So you very properly went to the police," he agreed. "Do I understand that you only saw this Mr. Vanderdonck once in your life?"

"The day he took the rooms," answered Giles with a nod. "I don't bother them that pays their rent, and this Vanderdonck never bothered me."

"Hm-m!" mumbled Lavender. "Do you remember him? How he looked?"

"I never forget a face," declared Giles with emphasis. "He was middle aged, rather dark, and his hair was beginning to get gray. Pretty tall man he was, and heavy I would say, though he didn't look it."

"You know nothing about his business?"

"Not a thing. Looks to me now as if he didn't have any!"

Lavender smiled sweetly.

"You are quite right, Mr. Giles. He didn't!"

"What!" cried the landlord.

"Who occupied these rooms before Mr. Vanderdonck took them?" demanded Lavender.

"A dentist fellow named Bradbury."

Lavender chuckled and rubbed his hands. "Ah," said he, "it's a black, black case. But we have it in hand, Mr. Giles. Trust us, leave it entirely in our hands, and say nothing!"

We got rid of the old fool at last, and Lavender looked at his watch.

"Half past dinner time," he announced. "We're wasting moments, Gilly. I'll leave a note here for Morley to say we've been here and won't be back, then we'll go to luncheon and afterward we'll transfer our attentions to the more pleasant and lucrative task of aiding Miss Minor."

"But what did you mean by telling that fellow that Vanderdonck had no business?" I asked.

"Just that," was the reply. "He came here as a blind. The whole office shows it. Everything is practically as the dentist left it two years ago. Vanderdonck just moved in. The holes in the floor indicate where the chair of pain used to be, the walls have not been cleaned since the dentist took down his pictures, and the books and magazines for the most part were left there by the old tenant. The place was never intended for occupancy. Vanderdonck came here when it was necessary only. But someone else came here, too—came here and didn't leave again. The safe will tell the story. I'll tell Morley enough to make it look like *his* discovery. But the fact

is, Gilly, I'm as sure as I'm here that the safe contains all that is left of Charles Merritt!"

I spun about and looked with horror at the great black hideous thing, and a dreadful picture formed in my mind as I seemed to see the door swing open, upon —what? But Lavender, without a shudder, sat down to pen his note to Morley.

III

At luncheon I questioned Lavender vigorously, but he had little information to impart. He ate in silence for the greater part of the meal and afterward smoked several thoughtful cigarettes.

"I've told you practically all I know about the case, Gilly," was all he said in direct reply to my questions. "And what I know, I know chiefly because it *must* be so. Of actual evidence I have very little, but there certainly have been many significant indications."

"And now we go back to Miss Minor and her troubles?"

"Exactly! You've no objections to going back to Miss Minor, surely?"

I laughed. "None in the world. I like her very much. But what did you say in your note to Morley, Lavender?"

"Just this: *'Morley, open safe at earliest opportunity. It contains the solution of two mysteries. See morning papers.'* Now will you call a taxi?"

The progress of the taxi was slow, for the press was bewildering. A mounted policeman, dancing his horse in the maelstrom, recognized Lavender and gave him a nod of greeting. The line of automobiles had stopped for perhaps the twelfth time. The officer's greeting called my friend's wandering attention back to his surroundings, and suddenly he was sitting straight up and looking at a shop window within line of his vision. It was a barber shop, as it happened, and as vastly uninteresting as most barber shops, as far as I could see. But Lavender had seen more than the shop.

"See the placard, Gilly," he nodded. "The 'Tinfoil Revue' again. We can't dodge it, it seems. The woman in the picture, if I'm not mistaken, is the very person we were discussing. No, not Miss Minor. I mean Miss Sidney Kane."

I looked and saw that he was right. Her name appeared below the portrait in letters of some size.

"An atrocious portrait, too, I should imagine," he continued. "Do you know, Gilly, on second thought I think I shall be altruistic this afternoon. You shall go alone to Miss Minor, pay our respects, and listen to anything she may have to tell us. I will inform you what further you are to ascertain. As for myself, I shall—this is Wednesday, isn't it, Gilly?—I shall go to a matinée, I think, against the sterner labors that lie ahead of us. Thus we shall both be benefited, according to our tastes."

I am, of course, frequently a fool, but I am never as big a fool as Lavender's remarks often would suggest. I looked back at him sternly.

"What you mean is, that you will go to the 'Tinfoil Revue' and see Miss Kane," I corrected.

"Well, if you put it that way, yes," he grinned. "The fact is, Gilly, the lady attracts me, and there already has been so much coincidence in this case, or in these cases I should say, that I'm determined to check them against each other and see what happens. The theatre, I believe, is just around the corner."

"What am I to ask Miss Minor?" I demanded.

"First, whether she has heard from her father. I'm inclined to think that she has not, but ask her anyway. Tell her that I think she will hear from him shortly, but not to be too sanguine. Then ask her permission to look casually over his desk, or whatever he uses, to see if there are any clues to his movements. Probably the young lady will have done this herself, but you will make a more thorough job of it. Look at the letters if there are any, however far back they may go, and don't leap at any wild conclusions whatever you find. Your principal task is

to remember what you see so that you can tell me about it to-night."

"And when shall I see you?"

He hesitated. "You have a key. Be in my rooms at six. I may join you for dinner. If I'm not there by six, though, I won't be in for dinner. Sit around until about eight, as I may call you up if I don't come. If you don't hear from me by eight—well, I'm darned if I know when you will."

It sounded very dubious indeed. "Look here, Lavender," I said uneasily, "does that mean that you are going into some danger?"

"Without you, Gilly? Not by a large majority! I wouldn't think of going into danger without my second line of defense. No, it means that I may be detained longer than I now expect, that's all. If there is any danger it will come later and you shall have your full share, I promise."

With that I was forced to be content, although what new idea had possessed my eccentric friend I could not imagine. No doubt he would see Miss Kane and confront her with her apparent knowledge of Vanderdonck, and no doubt he would ask about the disappearance of Charles Merritt. I thought again of that sinister safe in Vanderdonck's rooms, and in fancy I saw a slow dark stream issuing from the impassable crack of its heavy door.

Lavender climbed from the machine, and with a wave of his hand disappeared for a moment in the throng of cars. An instant later I saw him standing before the barber shop window, studying the libelous portrait of Sidney Kane. Then again I lost him as the whirlpool shifted, and he did not reappear. I continued on my way alone.

It was a pleasant enough ride to the Minor mansion far out on the north side, and it was pleasant to find Miss Minor at home. Her exclamation of delight at sight of me was enough to pay for any disappointment caused by Lavender's desertion.

But charming as was Miss Shirley Minor and happy as was the hour or two I spent in her company, I learned not a thing calculated to further our investigations. There were few letters from persons other than Miss Minor herself. Her letters, Cyril Minor had saved for years back; he seemed to have saved all she had ever written to him. But for the rest I found nothing but a scattering of business communications of no particular interest save as they furnished the names of a number of Minor's early ventures. As Lavender had foretold, Miss Minor had heard nothing from her father, so at the close of my visit I made her happy with my friend's message of cheer, and took my departure. I was convinced not only that I was in love with Shirley Minor, but also that I was a very poor detective indeed.

It was growing toward dusk as I climbed the interminable and familiar steps to Lavender's rooms, and as I let myself in the clock struck five. I helped myself to a cigar, placed the humidor within reach, and picked up a magazine. But I did not read. I dozed instead, and finally I slept. When I awoke with a start, it was quite dark outside and the clock, when I had flooded the room with light, showed the hour to be well past eight. Lavender had not come and there had been no call. Evidently he had found work to do. So I went downstairs to dinner on the opposite corner, and then climbed the stairs again. I read diligently until past midnight, then as there was still no sign of Lavender I turned in on the bed I called mine.

It seemed that I had been asleep for no time at all when something wakened me. I sat up in bed to find Lavender in the room. It was two o'clock in the morning and he was whistling quietly to himself as he undressed.

"Jimmie," I said sleepily, "where the devil have you been?"

"Hullo, Gilly," said he. "Didn't intend to wake you. I was later than I thought I'd be, but it was worth while. I've got half the mystery solved."

My brain cells began to function. "Tell me!" I commanded.

"Can you follow me? All right." He lighted a cigarette and dropped into an easy chair. "Well, after I left you, Gilly, I had a look at the portrait of Miss Kane, as you probably saw, and then I went to the matinée and had a look at the lady herself. She's very clever, although nearer forty than thirty. After the show I sent around my card with a few words penciled on it, and she consented to see me."

"What did you write?" I asked, deeply interested.

"I wrote under my name, 'In connection with the case of Charles Merritt.'"

"Go on!"

"Well, she saw me. I told her I was looking into the Merritt affair and asked her if she could tell me anything. She asked why I had come to her. I said I had heard that they were friends. She replied that it was a fact but she didn't know who could have told me. Anyway, she told me about the disappearance which was much as it was reported in the newspapers. He didn't answer his cue, and wasn't to be found. He hasn't been seen since. Was he a drinker? I asked. She was indignant. Not more than the average man! Had he any love affairs? She hesitated, then she believed not. I was shooting more or less in the dark, of course, although not entirely so. When she had told me all that I already knew and all that she cared to volunteer, which wasn't much, I asked her point blank if she knew Peter Vanderdonck."

He paused and chuckled.

"She nearly fainted. I thought she was going to faint. Then she said, no, she did not. I asked her what had frightened her. She said she was not frightened but that her part tired her. I asked whether it were not a fact that Merritt and Vanderdonck were friends or acquaintances. I phrased it that way on purpose to put her mind at ease. She replied that she believed they were. She thought she had heard Mr. Merritt mention Mr.

Vanderdonck but she couldn't be sure. Anyway, she had not deceived me; she did not know Mr. Vanderdonck! I let it go at that. But I asked her if she did not think it strange that Mr. Merritt and Mr. Vanderdonck should disappear at the same time. She did not know that Mr. Vanderdonck had disappeared, she said, but if it were so, why certainly it was strange. You see, she was getting her wits back more rapidly than at first and the longer I talked the better she became. Finally I told her that I knew where Merritt was, and that threw her into a funk again. 'Where?' she asked. I looked her in the eye and said, 'He's in Mr. Vanderdonck's safe!'

"At this point she sat down. She'd been standing, up to then, hoping I'd go. 'Just who are you?' she demanded. And I said, 'Actually, Miss Kane, I'm just a private investigator hired by a Miss Minor to find her father, who is missing. But accidentally I blundered onto this other case, through helping a friend in the police department. I'm still helping him.' I told her I was sorry to have had to disturb her, thanked her for her information, and got out before she had time to catch her breath. I hope I didn't upset her so that she could not play her part in the evening."

"Did you, Jimmie?"

"No, I didn't," he chuckled. "She was there, for I saw her come out after the show. She appeared quite calm and perfectly at ease, and I fancy she was, too. I have no doubt that she did some important telephoning as soon as I'd left her in the afternoon."

"And where have you been until this hour?"

"Out scouting in the neighborhood of Miss Kane's home, which is in Elmhurst and a jolly long way from here."

"Looking for Vanderdonck? You think she has been concealing him?"

"Well, yes, I do. I think she is still concealing him. Anyway, I didn't find him. Of course, he may not be there."

"You think that this Vanderdonck murdered Merritt, don't you, Lavender?"

"My dear fellow, no. There's no murder in this case, net yet, anyway. It's plain comedy from beginning to end. I played with you a bit about it and I played with Morley, but I'll quit now since you won't see for yourself. Morley, in point of fact, has seen, for he took my tip and opened the safe."

"And he didn't find the body of Charles Merritt?"

"Not even a hair. Well, yes, perhaps a *hair*. What I told you, Gilly, was that the safe contained *all that was left* of Charles Merritt, and it was strictly true. In other words, it contained his clothing and part of his makeup. You see, old man, Merritt and Peter Vanderdonck were the same individual. Vanderdonck decided to quit being Merritt, so he quit and packed Merritt, so to speak, in the safe. Then he vanished himself. Of course it was guesswork until Morley opened the safe, but it was *safe* guessing, if I may be permitted a bad pun. Everything pointed to the accuracy of my deductions—the unused office, the greasy wash bowl to which the water clung as it receded, the dirty towel smelling of grease paint, the notice in the paper of Miss Kane's success, and so on. Merritt made certain changes at the theatre after his performances but the final cleaning up he reserved for Vanderdonck's rooms, where he was safer from recognition in the event of an uncontemplated meeting."

I digested all this in silence. At length I said, "And Miss Kane is concealing Vanderdonck from pursuit? Why?"

"She probably loves him," opined Lavender, "and for reasons of his own he doesn't want to appear as yet. I called Morley and told him all this, after he'd told me that he'd opened the safe, and now I suppose the police will drop the case. There's no real crime in it after all, and they are not hired to catch Giles' delinquent tenants."

"Meanwhile," I said ironically, "we continue to search for another missing man, who is as far away, or as near, as ever. Probably he'll turn out to be the missing Mrs.

Jamesson about whom we read in the paper this morning."

Lavender laughed at my bitterness.

"No, Gilly, nothing like that. But I'm afraid that by morning we, too, will be out of a job. I expect that by morning Miss Minor will have heard from her father and will call off the hunt. I have been so sure of it all day that I haven't bothered much with *that* case. Somewhere along the line of our investigations, he will have received word of our search and he will instantly communicate with his daughter, whom, you must remember, he does not know to be in town."

IV

As usual Lavender was right. His prescience was astounding. We were not finished with breakfast in the morning when the telephone bell rang, and at the other end of the connection was Miss Minor. Lavender listened to her message.

"I see," he replied. "Yes, I quite expected it, Miss Minor. In fact I have been waiting for your call. Naturally there is no further occasion for my services. Was it a phone call, may I ask, or a wire?"

He listened again.

"I understand. Very well, Miss Minor. And if ever again I can be of service to you, remember that I shall be glad to serve. Good-by!"

The last words fell like clods upon my heart. Lavender was smiling oddly as he turned away.

"*Finis coronat opus,*" said he. "That means, Gilly, 'the end crowns the work.' We are politely, courteously, but definitely and conclusively 'fired,' as it were. Miss Minor has heard from her father—a wire early this morning, saying merely that he was well and would be home soon."

"How did you know she would hear from him?" I asked morosely.

"I knew that she was bound to. You see, he found out that I was on his trail and was afraid that I would make his disappearance look like something it was never intended to be. When he went away he had no idea of the publicity that would follow his action, and he had no thought that his daughter would return and start a hunt for him. He managed it all rather badly, as a matter of fact."

"Do you suppose he returned to the club and they told him there that we were looking for him?"

"No, I don't believe he's been near the club. I think Miss Kane told him."

"Miss Kane!" I shouted. "What has Miss Kane to do with *this* case?"

"A great deal," said Lavender, "since she was undoubtedly at the bottom of Minor's disappearance, as she was at the bottom of the Vanderdonck-Merritt disappearance. You remember I told you that I had contrived to bring Minor's name into my conversation with her yesterday? I did it purposely, so she *would* tell him. I thought it would inform him of his daughter's return and that this action would follow."

"What is the secret of it all, Lavender?" I exclaimed. "Why did he go away? Why did Merritt masquerade as Vanderdonck, or Vanderdonck as Merritt? And what has Miss Kane to do with all of them?"

"I'll tell you how it works out, Gilly, as nearly as I can. And I must tell you about my investigations of last night. They have a bearing on your questions.

"I went to Elmhurst, as I explained. In fact, I went twice—once after leaving Miss Kane in the afternoon, and once after the evening performance. On the latter occasion I followed Miss Kane. In the afternoon I merely made inquiries in the neighborhood. Miss Kane has lived there for about three months, I was informed by the rental agency, with an invalid brother and a maid. At first I naturally thought that the invalid brother was the man I wanted, but the three months knocked that idea in the head for Minor has been living at home and

has been at his club until a week ago, while the invalid brother lives with Miss Kane and doesn't go out any place."

"Then he's Vanderdonck!" I said.

"Well," demurred Lavender, "I suppose it's conceivable, but I don't agree, Gilly. Really, the same objection applies to Vanderdonck. No, in my theory of this amusing case, he can't be Vanderdonck, either. I may as well tell you at once that I believe not only that Vanderdonck was Merritt, but that Minor was both of them!"

I sat up very straight in my chair and stared at him for a moment in silence.

"I'm not crazy," he replied to my glance. "I don't think I am, Gilly. I'm admitting that the invalid brother *may* be Vanderdonck, and that Minor may be some place else. I'm even admitting that the invalid brother may be just himself, an honest-to-goodness invalid brother of Miss Kane. But I don't think so. Everything points to the truth of my idea that Merritt, Vanderdonck, and Minor are one and the same individual, playing a game. And Minor isn't anxious that his daughter shall discover what that game is, as least not until it is played out. That's why he wired Miss Shirley and why we were called off. We were getting too 'warm,' as the boys say. Of course Miss Minor had no idea that in releasing us she was playing her father's game."

He shook his head. "What puzzles me, however, is that invalid brother. If he isn't Minor, and isn't Vanderdonck, to accept your idea for a moment, who is he, unless he is just himself?"

"I think he's Mrs. Jameson," I said with a grin.

Lavender laughed. "No," he replied. "She, at least, has nothing to do with this case. She just happens to have disappeared on the same day.

"Well, to continue. Having learned nothing in particular yesterday afternoon, I followed Miss Kane home last night. I wanted to see whom, if anybody, she would meet at her home. She met nobody. There were lights in the place for some time, chiefly upstairs, but after she

had closed the door I didn't have even a second glimpse of Miss Kane. Not a shadow on the blind. Finally darkness fell over the house, and I came home. I'm very much afraid indeed that the invalid brother is not a myth, that he actually exists—if for no other reason than to complicate this case."

"And you have no idea why Minor is doing all this?"

"Oh, yes, a sort of an idea, Gilly, but it isn't complete. I don't understand why Miss Shirley has not known all about it from the beginning. There's nothing heinous in it, that I can see."

"And now I suppose we shall never know," I suggested.

"I think we will," said Lavender. "I think that Minor himself will look us up to see how much we know, and to tell us the rest, so that we will keep our mouths shut."

However, it came about rather differently, for we had talked barely an hour when again our telephone bell rang and again it was Miss Shirley Minor who called. Lavender's expression was one of comical relief as he listened to what she had to say.

"Quite right, quite right!" he said. And a minute later, "Yes, I think I can. Can you join us? Then please do. Come at once!"

There was a gleam in his eye when he had hung up the receiver.

"Off again, on again," he chuckled. "It gets better, Gilly! Miss Minor distrusts her wire. She doesn't believe her father sent it and she is more alarmed than ever. It seems that the telegram was signed 'Father,' instead of 'Dad,' and I think the young lady's point is well taken. If he always signed himself 'Dad,' he should have done so this time. It is such slips that betray criminals. Now I know what happened. Minor didn't send the wire and Miss Kane did, probably unknown to Minor.

"Well, it should be over shortly. Miss Minor asked me if I knew where her father was. She had an idea that I did because I had told her that she would hear

from him. I took a chance and said 'Yes!' She's on her way here now."

I looked startled. "Can you make good on that, Jimmie?" I cautiously asked.

"Well, I can at least bluff Miss Kane," he replied, "and that is what I propose to do. We'll drive out with Miss Shirley herself and surprise the actress lady at her tardy breakfast. I think something interesting will develop. It will be dramatic and you had better possess your soul in patience till we get there. I won't spoil it for you."

He flung himself into a chair and gave himself over to some deep thinking. "Please don't talk for a few minutes, Gilly," he cautioned me.

It was exactly twenty minutes before he sprang to his feet, in which time he had smoked a great many cigarettes. A new gleam was in his eye, and without a word he strode to the telephone. From his pocket he produced a list of numbers, then lifted the receiver. In a moment or two he was talking apparently to a shopkeeper in Elmhurst.

"You remember my asking you yesterday about Miss Kane and her brother?" he queried. "I forgot one thing. Do you often see Mr. Kane, the brother, in the streets?"

He listened eagerly to the reply.

"Thank you, that's all."

He swung on me. "Gilly, what do you think the fellow said? He said, 'No, nor anybody else. He don't go out. Nobody ever sees him.' "

"Well, that's natural enough," I started to reply.

But Lavender was calling another number and asking the same question. Again he turned to me.

"That was a neighbor," he crowed. "She said, 'I only saw him once. That was about a week ago. It was getting along toward dark, and I didn't see him very clear. I guess he's pretty sick.' Excuse her grammar, Gilly, but digest her remarks. Don't they tell you anything? What an ass I was not to have guessed before!"

"I confess——" I began.

"Don't!" he laughed. "I've been as big an idiot as you have. Bless our poor innocent hearts! Why, it means only one thing. This invalid is never seen, and never has been seen, except once by this neighbor—and then at night—for the very good reason that he never existed. Until a week ago, when this neighbor saw him going in, he'd never been there! For three months he had been an invention of Miss Kane's, to take care of emergencies. She knew that sometime Minor would come, and that when he did he might be seen. She had to provide for that. I'll bet she moved in at night. She started the fiction somehow or other, right after she moved in, so that if ever Minor came and was seen at a window, his presence would be accounted for; so that if Minor even had to leave in daylight, he could do it without talk. A week ago he came, and for the first time the 'invalid brother' was seen, and whoever saw him thought he *was* the 'invalid brother.' And he's there now, too, keeping out of sight. The place isn't thickly populated, the houses are pretty far apart, and not many people would be inclined to ask questions. What gossip there has been about the 'invalid brother' has come from the shops, where I have no doubt Miss Kane herself began it. The shopkeepers talked as they always do, to any who will listen, and those of their customers who were interested, remembered."

"Very clever," I commented.

Lavender agreed heartily, except that he was thinking of Miss Kane's scheme, and I was thinking of his solution of the problem.

So it came about that an hour and a half after our conversation Lavender and I and Miss Shirley Minor rang a doorbell out in Elmhurst, or at any rate, one of us did, and directed a startled maid to take our cards to Miss Kane. At the same time Lavender quietly inserted his foot in the door opening. The maid had no alternative. She let us into the sitting room.

And then a curious thing happened. Miss Minor's eyes fell upon a photograph on the mantel, and a puzzled look

spread over her face. Following her glance I saw what must have been a portrait of Miss Kane taken some years before, and I, too, was startled. For it might have been a portrait of Shirley Minor herself.

Lavender was watching us. He smiled very kindly at the girl.

"Yes," he said, "it is a little older than Miss Minor, of course, but on the whole a very good portrait, don't you think?"

Shirley Minor turned to him swiftly.

"You are going to tell me something very strange," she said. "Tell me at once! Who is that woman?"

"I believe her to be your mother," answered Lavender, quietly.

The girl's hand shook and her face twitched.

"My m-mother," she stammered, "is dead! I knew her! She died about three years ago, Mr. Lavender!"

"God knows, I have no desire to cause you distress," replied my friend, "but I firmly believe the original of that portrait to be Miss Sidney Kane, your mother."

Then the curtains were swept aside, and a tall handsome woman was in the room. Her entrance was theatrical. Her face was the face of Shirley Minor, but older and sadder.

"Yes," she said, in a harsh strained voice, "he is right. I am Miss Sidney Kane, dear—and your mother. After this, there is nothing to be concealed?"

"Surely there never has been?" suggested Lavender.

"Cyril thought so," she replied defiantly.

"No doubt," was Lavender's reply. "It is too bad."

"Oh, tell me!" cried Shirley Minor. "Tell me before I scream!"

The older woman crossed the room and laid a hand on her daughter's head. The gesture was timid and caressing.

"I hope you will love me," she said simply. "Listen, dear. Your father and I were divorced when you were a tiny baby. There had been trouble. His family objected to his marrying an actress. Shortly afterward, he married

again. She was a charming woman, and she treated you as her own daughter and loved you. Your father tried to forget, and as part of the effort he allowed you always to believe that his wife was your mother. I think they were happy; I hope they were. You grew up, the years passed, and at length Mrs. Minor died, as you know. While she lived your father was content. After her death, he had *you*, and your face was a constant reminder of *me*. He felt that he had treated me badly and he set about finding me. He did find me, and we loved each other again. We have been married now for more than a year, but until recently we had not been together except for a few days at a time. I kept my position on the stage, and your father, who as a young man had wanted to be an actor, decided to join me there for in that way he could often be with me. He actually became popular as a comedian, to the great surprise of us both."

She smiled almost brightly for a moment, then her face saddened again.

"But he had to keep it all very quiet, or he thought he did. He hated publicity and he didn't want the old story raked up. You had been happy with your second mother, and he didn't want to take that from you. So he became two other men. On the stage he was Charles Merritt, but he never left this city. He played only here in Chicago. And he loved his work so much that he didn't care to leave it. When his part was over he would quietly dress for the street, leave the theatre, and become for a time Peter Vanderdonck. But Peter Vanderdonck was only a myth. He used the office as a place to hide himself while he became again Cyril Minor.

"I knew that some day he would break under the strain of the situation. I could see it coming, and I made a home ready for him to go to when the time came. A week ago, he became ill—don't be alarmed; he is better now! Someone had to care for him, and I had the best right. I brought him to my home here, but at the same time, of course, both Peter Vanderdonck and Charles Merritt also disappeared. I couldn't even explain Charles

Merritt's disappearance without betraying Cyril. And so I did nothing."

Lavender nodded, and took up the tale.

"And, of course, you had no idea that Shirley would come home and miss her father, nor that this old idiot of a landlord would start a search for Vanderdonck. It was all unfortunate in a way, and yet it has ended very happily. But Mr. Minor would have done better to have trusted Shirley entirely from the beginning."

"As if I would have cared!" cried Miss Minor, springing to her feet. "Where is he?"

The look in her mother's eyes stopped her. She retraced her steps, and pulling down the older head to her own kissed the sorrowful eyes.

"I'm sure I shall love you," she said, "but it is still so strange and new, and, of course—Dad——!"

"Of course!" said Miss Sidney Kane, and with a lift of her finger to us, she led the way upstairs.

VINCENT STARRETT

THE OTHER WOMAN

"You are Mr. Dulau?" queried the visitor in surprise, fixing her queer cold eyes upon the plump figure of the little detective.

The second occupant of the dingy office, who had bounded to his feet at the entrance of the haughty creature in green velvet, bowed profoundly.

"Yes, Madame," he replied; and there was a suave humility in his words and in his gesture that was as disconcerting as it was elusive.

The lady laughed in high falsetto, and the man was permitted to believe that the merriment concealed the ghost of an apology for the implication of the earlier speech.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," she continued, turning it into words. "From your reputation, I had imagined you to be rather a younger man."

"And, no doubt, somewhat less gray and portly," said the detective. "Paradoxically, the present age of wisdom entertains sad doubts as to the wisdom of age. If I can be of service to you, Madame," he added, "I shall be most happy to serve."

The hand that held the glittering lorgnette twitched, as if it felt an inclination to rise. The lady stared. She was slender and well-preserved, although obviously Time had nothing left to offer her, save only age.

"I presume you can be discreet?" she inquired, at length.

"To the point of indiscretion," said Alexandre Dulau, with another bow. "May I invite Madame to be seated?"

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She seated herself with a green velvet sound and a shrug that dismissed his peculiarities as she would have dismissed a disturbing doubt.

"You are a strange man, Mr. Dulau," said the lady, "and in that your reputation does you no injustice. I am Mrs. Hopewell Grange!"

The man did not at once fall down and adore. Instead, he nodded brightly and repeated the name.

"Mrs. Hopewell Grange," he murmured. "To be sure!"

"I have called," continued the lady, "to ask you to perform a delicate mission."

"I shall be happy to perform it."

"It may be very difficult. I have myself failed. It is about my husband."

"I commiserate with you sincerely."

"You are not alone, Mr. Dulau. His absences are becoming the talk of the town."

"Of that section of the town's inhabitants which Madame honors by her acquaintance," corrected the little detective.

"Exactly," smiled Mrs. Hopewell Grange coldly, and again she stared suspiciously at the plump, gray-haired little man whose eyes were so disturbing, whose words seemed so significant. "I hope you will understand that my rôle is not that of the unhappy wife claiming to be misunderstood."

"I do not so understand, Madame, although it must always be our chiefest consolation that we are misunderstood."

"Perhaps it is my pride that makes me wish to discover his secret."

Alexandre Dulau bowed for the third time.

"We desire to retain that which we possess," he said, "although by an apparent anomaly, only that allures us which we do not possess."

He seated himself at the farther side of the littered table. He leaned back comfortably and crossed one plump knee over the other. He placed the tips of his thumbs and fingers together and smiled seraphically.

"You are acquainted, perhaps, with my husband's name and position?"

"With both, I believe. He is Mr. Hopewell Grange, an operator on the Board of Trade, an official of the Commerce Association, and a director of the Jefferson Club. He is a Presbyterian, and a former member of the School Board. His collection of postage stamps is the second in the country."

The lady's eyes widened by degrees until a white oval bordered the iris.

"Your information is amazing," she admitted, "and entirely accurate. He is also given to fits of melancholy, and occasionally," she added bitterly, "to extraordinary disappearances."

"It is about his disappearances that Madame has been good enough to seek me out," nodded the detective. "I am attentive and sympathetic."

"They occur possibly once a month, on an average," said Mrs. Hopewell Grange, "and they are of no regular duration. He has never absented himself from home for more than three nights. The first experience dates back a number of years. In recent years, the absences have been more frequent than formerly. He goes to his office in the morning, and telephones that he will not be home that evening. There is no further explanation. When he returns, and I ask him where he has been, he replies that he has been away on business."

"He is restless, perhaps, when he is at home?"

"Quite the contrary. When he is at home, he is apparently happy and content. He has everything to make him so. Possibly you are also acquainted with our circumstances?"

"You are what is termed wealthy, I believe. I have passed your home and looked upon it with admiration. It contains rare portraits and books, and an aquarium. Around it are conservatories and splendid estates."

The lady nodded casually. "You see, there is no reason for unhappiness. There is nothing that he can not have if

he wishes it. Our friends are numerous and include the best people in town."

"And Madame's reasons for supposing that her husband's absences are *not* upon business?"

"Something in his eyes, in the tone of his voice, in his excessive courtesy and thoughtfulness at such times. There is mockery in everything. Everything conceals a falsehood. When I ask for details of the business that calls him away, my interest is discouraged; I am put off with words. I am told that I would not understand; that it is enough that he finds it necessary to go. Besides, what business would call him away at this time of life? His business is here and it is established. Younger men carry it on for him. But I have allowed him to think that he is deceiving me."

"It is frequently easier to let oneself be deceived than to struggle against deception," agreed the detective sententiously. "The clever person knows this—and makes capital of it."

"But I am most unhappy."

"Possibly there is no occasion for it, after all. When we are very happy or very unhappy, we become superstitious, and we discover signs and meanings in the most ordinary occurrences."

"I have followed him," said the lady, "but without result."

"Madame has herself followed her husband? Then it is, indeed, most serious. You suspect—another woman?"

"What else can I think?"

"There are happier things to think; but I understand Madame's emotion. Tell me, please, of your pursuit."

"He had called me, late one afternoon, to say that he would not be home that evening. At once, I took a taxicab to his office. I was waiting in the cab when he emerged from his building. He went away on foot, and so I dismissed my driver. He walked for blocks, idled for a time in the park, and at length walked back as he had come. He entered an old building almost beside the one in which he has his office, and disappeared. You

know the business district of the near North Side? It is a hodge-podge of the old and the new; of great office buildings and converted residences. I entered quickly, and was in time to see him take an elevator. I watched the indicator, and the first stop was at the second floor. The second stop was at the fourth floor, and the third and last was at the fifth floor, which is the top. I visited all of these floors, but found no trace of my husband, nor did I see him leave the building again."

"Of course, he may have left the building while Madame was carrying on her investigation upstairs. But what did you find upon those floors?"

"Old offices. It is a dingy building, occupied for the most part by theatrical agents and second-rate lawyers and cold cream salesmen. The rooms are dirty and old. Many were closed, and many unoccupied. I went into some, pretending that I had lost an address. I asked for a mythical Mr. Smith."

Alexandre Dulau smiled and shook his head. "He is far from mythical, this Mr. Smith," he said. "He exists in vast numbers. Madame was fortunate that she did not encounter him in every office she visited."

"Should I have asked for my husband?"

"Perhaps not. But what, in the end, was Madame's conclusion?"

"I believe that he entered the building to throw off possible pursuit, and that later he went away to his ultimate destination."

"It is quite possible," admitted the little detective. "You did not repeat the experiment?"

"A month later I repeated it, and the same thing occurred."

"The same thing? Quite the same?"

"Quite the same. A long walk, then the park, then the old building. I dared not enter the elevator with him, and so again I lost him."

"But that is most fascinating! May I ask what streets your husband strolled, Madame?"

"The office is in the Clementine Block, which is in

Ontario Street. He walked on Ontario to the Boulevard, on the Boulevard to the Park, and back as he had come."

"A delightful walk. And in the park? What did he do in the park, Madame?"

"He fed the squirrels and the swans."

"That is all?"

"That is all—except that he looked at the water, and smoked a pipe. That is something he never does at home."

"Why does he not smoke a pipe at home?"

"I have never cared for the smell of a pipe, and so at home he smokes cigars."

"I see! But in his younger years he smoked a pipe? Before you were married?"

"Yes, and for a time afterward."

"You were not always wealthy?"

"We were never in poverty, if that is what you mean," replied Mrs. Hopewell Grange stiffly. "We began, perhaps, in a small way, and were very successful at once. I am at a loss to understand what this has to do with the matter in hand."

"It may be, nothing. I am an inquisitive old man, *n'est-ce pas?* I ask Madame's pardon. It is her wish that I follow her husband when again he absents himself?"

"He will absent himself tonight. He announced this morning, as he left the house, that he would be away for a day or two."

"Then I must be quick, if I am to catch him. You entertained, last night?"

"Yes, there was a large company at the house; but that is not unusual."

"And tonight? Do you again entertain tonight?"

"Tonight we are expected to appear at the home of a friend. It will be embarrassing to explain, as it has been embarrassing before. People are beginning to doubt, and to suspect."

"It must be embarrassing indeed!"

"It is ridiculous and unnecessary. I am determined to put an end to it."

"Exactly; and I am Madame's unworthy tool. I must

hurry if I am to succeed. I shall ask Madame to excuse me."

"I shall hear from you in the morning?"

"In the morning, Madame. The truth, of course, is what Madame wants?"

"The truth, of course! Why else should I employ you?"

"Why else, indeed! The truth, of course. It is what we all demand to know, is it not? Yet if happiness be one's aim, falsehood must often remain the basis of one's existence. In Madame's case, however, it is different. Falsehood, if she is correct, has operated to make her most *un*happy."

"Of course I should be pleased to know that my suspicions are unfounded."

"Of course! But Madame shall have the truth by morning, whatever the cost to her vanity."

"Vanity? You think then that it is wounded vanity that leads me to act?"

The detective bowed humbly. "We are never at a loss to discover a reason why we do not act from sheer vanity, Madame; and immediately we are vain of the reason we have discovered."

Mrs. Hopewell Grange stared dubiously at the man she had employed to resolve her unhappiness. For an instant it occurred to her that it might be well to end the episode before it had begun, and to continue as her own detective. Then her husband's face rose before her, and she flushed angrily.

"Very well, Mr. Dulau," she said. "I shall expect your report in the morning."

II

"You have really traced him to his lair?" asked Mrs. Hopewell Grange eagerly, almost before the taxicab from which she had alighted had time to depart. "You *know* where he is, and where he has been? Tell me at once!"

Alexandre Dulau raised his twinkling eyes to the office building, half way along the block, and brought them back to the raging eyes of the lady.

"I thought it well that we should meet here, so that you might see everything for yourself," he replied. "Yes, I am prepared to make my report, Madame; but it will be more complete and understandable if you will accompany me over the ground I traversed in my investigation."

"Where is my husband?" demanded Mrs. Hopewell Grange, almost savagely.

"He is at his desk, at his office—there, in the building you know. He has been there since nine o'clock. We are now at the intersection of his street and the Boulevard. It was here, yesterday, that I picked him up. Shall we move in his footsteps?"

He bowed courteously, and with a gesture indicated the sunlit stretches of the wide avenue. Unwillingly, she began to walk beside him.

"You are taking me to—?"

"To the very spot, Madame. Within an hour, you shall know the truth."

"The truth!" she muttered, and set her small upper teeth firmly upon her lower lip.

"You will pardon me if I seem irrelevant and presumptuous, I am sure," said the little detective, "but may I ask Madame whether, in other years, she strolled as we are strolling now?"

"As we are strolling now? In this street, do you mean?" There was impatience in her voice. "Of course, I have strolled here. My husband and I walked here frequently, shortly after we were married. The neighborhood was not what it is today," she explained vaguely, "but we liked the trees, and—"

"And they are still beautiful, you would say, as the sunlight is still warm! It is true, Madame. Perhaps these old buildings that we are passing are old friends, familiars of those other days. Ah, lucky, lucky youth!"

"I really do not recall many of them. It was a great many years ago. But tell me, Mr. Dulau, if you know, why it is that my husband always comes this way. Am I right in supposing him to be eluding pursuit?"

"Possibly, Madame. Possibly encouraging it. Who can

say? There were, of course, no motors and no busses in those days that your heart is now remembering, Madame; and yet, I venture to suppose that the streets were no less charming? Tell me, did not the same children play in the streets? Did not the same—?"

"I do not remember the children," interrupted the lady coldly. "It is hardly likely, however, that they are the same. The streets seemed pleasant enough, as I recall them, but I prefer them as they are today. I am not an old-fashioned woman, Mr. Dulau. Why do you speak in this manner? Is it that you fear to tell me the truth about my husband?"

"Courage, Madame! The truth is not far distant. In time we shall come upon it, in all its pathos, in all its tragedy, in all its nakedness. I but prepare you for it, dear lady."

"With sentimental ravings about trees and children! *I* am not a child, Mr. Dulau, and I have employed you for a specific purpose."

"Which purpose I have understood, and which employment I have fulfilled. But see, we approach the park! I call your attention to the lordly elms and poplars, the lovely, spreading locusts. Surely in those other days you entered the park? Surely you paused beside the lake to watch the water rush against the rocks, to feel the spray upon your cheeks and in your hair? Come now, in that other time by which your heart is now so strangely moved, did not your husband tell you—foolishly enough perhaps!—that the blue of your eyes was no less lovely than that of this inland sea?"

"I believe you are quite mad!" said Mrs. Hopewell Grange. "Or is it that you are making fun of me? Tell me at once, Mr. Dulau: have you traced my husband to his paramour, or are you deceiving me with words?"

"Indeed, Madame, he has been traced and discovered. We are now but touching the landmarks of his progress."

"And is there—I demand to know!—is there another woman concerned in these absences of his?"

"Alas, dear lady, I am afraid that it is so! Yes, Madame, sad as I am to have to tell you it, there is another woman."

"I knew it! I knew it! Oh, the beast, the fool! The insufferable animal! Who is she?"

"I beg of you to be calm. In a little while you shall know all. No single little thing shall I conceal from you. I ask only that you have patience. Shortly we shall turn back, even as your husband would turn back were he here today; as he will turn back this evening, when again he takes his stroll with his pipe. Please, please, my dear Mrs. Hopewell Grange! See, we are not far from the little lake where the swans float. It is there that your husband feeds crumbs to the great, stupid birds. What can be his reason for that, I wonder! Tell me, Madame, somewhat of his past. It will be helpful to me. In his earlier years, did he care for the birds and squirrels?"

"He was mad about them, I think. He was crazy about all animals, although I fail to see how it bears upon his present misdemeanors."

"And sometimes you came here with him, to feed the swans; to laugh at the silly squirrels?"

"Often! He would not come without me."

"And you liked it, did you not? You adored it?"

"I was less enthusiastic than yourself. I did not mind it. We were young and silly, Mr. Dulau, as all youth is young and silly. Why do you recall it now?"

"That Madame may understand why her husband fled from her to this other woman."

"Very well; I understand. He is just a fool, you are trying to tell me; in his second youth perhaps. It is a slim excuse, but it is kind of you to find it for him. Now let us turn back to the building."

Alexandre Dulau sighed deeply and halted his onward progress.

"Yes, youth is silly," he said, "very silly. Its dearest wish is to be grown up. And sometimes when it is grown up, it would give all it possesses to be young again. It shall be as you wish, Madame. I had hoped that you would perhaps

continue with me to the great lake, and allow me to smoke my pipe beside the rocks. But come! We shall turn back."

From his pocket he drew forth an antiquated pipe and screwed it together. This he filled with tobacco from an old pouch and placed it between his teeth.

"Madame does not object?" he murmured, plucking a match from its sheath.

"I *do* object, but you may smoke it, if it pleases you. You, at least, are no care of mine, after today. I abominate pipes, but I have no right to forbid you anything—even a pipe that is like the one I asked my husband to throw away."

"It *is* similar, is it not? I fancied your husband's pipe when I saw it, and so I have purchased one like it. And now, again, we approach the Boulevard. Our return stroll begins. Conceive the happiness, Madame, one feels in retracing old steps, in revisiting old scenes and glimpses, old happinesses and old loves, long vanished but unforgotten, long—"

Mrs. Hopewell Grange turned angrily upon her companion.

"This insanity has gone far enough, Mr. Dulau," she said. "You will please take me at once to the place you have discovered, the place my husband spends his nights away from me; or you will at once admit yourself an impostor and a fraud, defeated in what I have employed you to accomplish."

She raised an imperious hand to the driver of a speeding taxicab, which swung inward with a grinding of brakes and stopped to await their pleasure.

"As you wish, Madame," bowed the little detective submissively. "We shall drive at once to the scene of your husband's infidelity."

No further words had been exchanged when they alighted before the ancient structure but one number removed from the greater edifice that housed the offices of Hopewell Grange. They crossed the sidewalk in silence, and entered the building. A waiting elevator received them;

it was one of two, decrepit and wheezing. Then the lady spoke:

"What floor?" she asked abruptly.

"Ah, the floor, of course! I beg Madame's pardon! Please take us to the third floor."

"The third?"

"Yes, Madame. He walks down from the fourth."

The gate clanged shut, and then clanged open. They stepped out into a corridor long and bleak, punctuated at intervals by dusty glass-paned doors. Before a door at the end of the corridor they paused, and Alexandre Dulau found a key in his pockets.

The eyes of Mrs. Hopewell Grange were fixed upon a dingy, fly-blown placard set into a crevice of the window pane. "Back in Five Minutes," it read in large characters; but the door itself suggested that the occupant of that room had gone forever.

They crossed the threshold, the detective quietly, the lady with rapid step and quivering nostrils. A dusty anteroom lay before them, across which they trod and through a door into a room beyond. Then Mrs. Hopewell Grange cried out in a strange voice and sat down quickly in a chair.

Yet it was a very ordinary room at which she stared, bewildered and incredulous. A plain, old-fashioned sitting room, miraculously translated from some old apartment to this extraordinary setting. On the mantel were photographs and books; an old clock ticked on a corner shelf; against the wall stood a battered table covered with a quaint old colored cloth. On the table was a small jar of tobacco, and in a tray beside it an antiquated pipe. In a corner, a low couch was gay with a scarlet quilting.

The room was uninhabited, save for the two who had burst into it.

The lady continued to stare with wide, bewildered eyes. Then a slow flush stole over her features, and suddenly she arose from the chair that held her as if it had become hot. The angry flush still colored her cheeks as she spoke.

"The fool!" she said, and her voice was harsh as a rusty hinge.

"Yes, Madame," replied the little detective, humbly, "there is a legend here, to that effect."

He indicated a small framed placard that hung upon the door behind her, and turning swiftly, in the printed handwriting of her husband, she read: *"This is the private residence of a sentimental old fool!"*

She turned to the detective.

"This is all? There is no other woman? You lied to me?"

"There is another woman, Madame," answered Alexandre Dulau, "but she has never come. Perhaps he has hopes; perhaps his hopes are dead. I can not say. I have never spoken with him. He has never seen me."

"It is merely a place for him to escape from himself? To smoke his old pipe? To sentimentalize over his old poverty? I do not understand it."

"An idea too clearly presented is often incomprehensible, Madame, as a too-glaring light compels us to close our eyes."

"It is a place, then, to escape from *me?"*

"It has become so, perhaps. It may be that the other woman some day will arrive. I am not certain that he has given up hope. The capacity of man for self-deception is still a mystery to me."

"The fool!" said Mrs. Hopewell Grange again; then slowly she began to make her way around the room, stopping here and there to examine some object that seemed to be familiar.

She paused for a moment before the clock, ticking on its high shelf, and, reaching up, tried the broken lock that held its glass door in place. The pictures on the walls for a moment engaged her attention; the photographs upon the mantel. One portrait, framed in a small oval of silver, she picked up and carried to the light.

"What a fool!" said Mrs. Hopewell Grange for the third time, and whether it was anger or another emotion that vibrated in her throat, the little detective could not say.

"I wonder!" he mused, as quietly he eased himself through the second door and started for the elevator. "It is quite conceivable; and yet—I wonder!" He plunged his thumb into the call button.

What he wondered was whether Hopewell Grange was that which his wife had called him.

As he walked briskly away into the morning sunlight, he muttered: "It is possible that I have done Mr. Hopewell Grange a great disservice. On the other hand, it is possible that I have acted with my usual intelligence. She is at once relieved and disappointed, at once angry and full of thought."

But whether the other woman ever would return to Hopewell Grange, so complicated and incomprehensible are human emotions, was beyond even the ability of Alexandre Dulau to fathom.

VINCENT STARRETT

THE ELEVENTH JUROR

THERE are few practicing citizens of the republic, I guess, who some time or other have not been called for jury service. The system is impartial, and, like lightning, you never know where it is going to strike.

It's unlike lightning, though—or the way lightning is supposed to operate—in one respect. It does, often, strike more than once in the same place. I have a friend, for instance, who has served on a dozen juries in as many years, in cases ranging anywhere from leasehold troubles to first degree murder. He doesn't particularly like to serve, but he's one of those citizens who think they owe a duty to the state, and all that sort of thing. And I have another friend who has been called a dozen times and hasn't served yet. He's an accomplished liar, and always manages to get the judge to excuse him.

Of course, it's easier to get excused in a big case than in a little one. The lawyers are more particular in a big case. If you want to dodge, just wait for the right question, and then give the wrong answer. If the prosecutor wants to hang a man for murder, tell him you are opposed to the death penalty, and before you know it you'll be collecting your coat and hat and heading back for the office. Or just suggest that you have followed the case pretty closely in the newspapers, and have formed a strong opinion about it. Something like that. It will always work; nearly always.

They don't really need you on a jury. There are always enough men who *want* to serve because they like it. It's a vacation from home and work, and it gives them a feeling

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of consequence to be sitting around in court, as important as the judge. Fountains of wisdom, and all that. They claim to be unprejudiced, and really they are a lot more prejudiced than the fellows who beg off. God help the prisoner who gets a jury of wiseacres that really want to sit in judgment on him! Who claim they haven't formed an opinion!

However, this isn't an essay. What I started out to tell was the story of my own first jury service. We were out for ten days without getting a verdict, and all the time—from first to last—the count stood eleven for hanging and one for acquittal. I was the juror who held out. On the eleventh day, we returned a verdict of not guilty, and the prisoner was acquitted. He became one of my best friends, for of course the newspapers found out that I had swung the jury, and he came around to thank me. About a year after the end of the trial, without any urging on my part, he told me something I had suspected from the beginning of the case. In fact, it had been part of my argument to the other jurors during ten days of talking, though I didn't dwell on it a lot. He said he didn't know —actually didn't know—whether he had committed the crime or not!

Of course, that didn't come out at the trial, although the idiot wanted to tell it. He was too honest to live. Fortunately, his lawyer was less scrupulous.

Horace Thistlethwaite was his lawyer—a tongue-twister of a name that made the courtroom laugh every time the prosecutor mispronounced it, which he did every chance he got. Ricketts was the prosecutor's name, so he didn't have much call to laugh at Thistlethwaite; but it never occurred to Ricketts that there could be *anything* funny about himself. I suppose the case is pretty well forgotten by this time, but it was a good one while it lasted. Good enough, anyway. Chicago may have two or three bigger and better ones, every year, but this one caused some talk in its day.

I had been interested in the case from the beginning, and had read everything I could about it, in all the news-

papers; but the last thing I thought of was that I would get a chance to serve on the jury that tried Murray. I was never more surprised in my life than I was the day the summons came. But I knew at once that I was going to serve on that jury unless I was thrown off by one side or the other. I couldn't think of any reason why I would not make a perfectly fair juror, and that was the attitude I intended to carry into court. But it struck me as remarkable that after the years the jury call had missed me, I should be called for service in a case that fascinated me the way this one did.

Of course, I couldn't be positive till I was sitting in the antechamber of the courtroom that it *was* the Murray case I was in for; but I was sure enough, for I had been following the papers, as I say, and I knew they were having a hard time getting a jury. They had already exhausted a couple of panels of veniremen, because it seemed that everybody had read about the case and had an opinion. The defense lawyers were afraid of men who had read about the case, and I didn't blame them. It certainly looked bad for Murray. But who *hadn't* read about it?

However, they got a jury. It was touch and go, as far as I was concerned, for they already had ten men accepted when I came in; ten whopping liars, sitting there as big as life, itching for the case to commence. I lied too, for I wanted the job as much as they did, and after the usual line of questions I got it. I said I had read very little about the case, had no opinions about it whatever, and was not averse to the death penalty; and I never told three bigger lies in a row, in my life. After awhile, they caught another plausible liar, and there we were, twelve of us, all innocent as—I was going to say innocent as the twelve apostles.

II

The case began to unfold next day. As I looked around at my fellow jurors, it occurred to me that I had never

seen eleven more ridiculous fatheads. However, that was what the prosecution wanted, and probably what Thistlethwaite wanted, too. It's a great system, the jury system in this country! If you look as if you might have an ounce of intelligence, neither side wants you; but give a lawyer twelve complete fools, without an idea between them, and he's happy. He knows if he loses his case it's his own fault.

Well, the wheels began to go round, and before long I was listening to everything I had already read and knew all about. The principal witness for the state was Patrolman Witte of the Waterside Station, a good-natured fat old hippopotamus, who must have been on the force to prove that the Irish don't have a monopoly on all the appointments. He told a straight story, though, and stuck to it like a good copper. . . . On the night of umpty-ump, or about two o'clock the next morning, to be exact, he had heard three shots fired in close order, and had hurried toward the sound. At Lambeth Avenue and Belvedere Road, he had found the prisoner, James Murray, standing still, looking at a revolver in his hand. Not far away was the body of a man, and the man had been shot to death. Questioned by Witte, the prisoner had denied all knowledge of the shooting, but was unable to tell why he carried a recently-discharged revolver. He seemed dazed, Witte said, and had evidently been drinking heavily. He made no attempt to escape, but went along quietly when Witte told him he was under arrest.

In a little while the whole story had been outlined. The dead man had been identified as Howard Blessing, a widower, and death had resulted from a bullet wound in the neck and another in the heart. Murray had been taken to the station, and the body of Howard Blessing had been taken to a neighboring undertaking establishment. Nobody called it a parlor, I remember, and I decided that only undertakers called their places parlors. Murray had been locked up and had slept like a log all night and part of the morning; then he had wakened and continued his denials. Later, after a coroner's committee had held him

to the grand jury, he had been formally charged with the murder and indicted. Witte didn't tell all this, but it came out early in the case and was corroborated by everybody concerned.

Naturally, the mystery was considerable. Murray denied flatly that he ever knew Howard Blessing, the inference being that in those circumstances he would hardly have killed him, even as a matter of drunken target practice—which didn't necessarily follow. He also denied that he ever carried or ever had owned a revolver, and in this he was supported by a lot of his friends, all very good citizens. Murray was a good citizen, himself; that was one of the things against him, really. He was smug, and prosperous, and he wore good clothes; and, even worse, he had a reputation as a sort of small-time reformer. That sort of fellow, when he's caught in something disreputable, like bootlegging or murder, doesn't make much of a hit with a jury of average citizens.

He was one of the last witnesses in his own behalf, and he made only a fair impression; and when he told his story of what had happened that night at Lambeth Avenue and Belvedere Road, he didn't make any impression at all. It was a pretty thin tale, and even his lawyer knew it. Murray admitted that he'd been drinking pretty heavily with some of the "boys," and the "boys" had already supported him in that. In fact, they all swore that he couldn't have held a revolver steady, even if he'd had one, which they knew he didn't. A fine tale to have to tell about a fellow associated with reform!

Murray also admitted that he wasn't walking toward home when the shots were fired on the corner, but he blamed that on the drink. He said, with an air of great candor, that he had been completely malted on the night in question, and hadn't any idea why he was at that intersection, holding a revolver in his hand. Somebody must have given it to him. Anyway, he knew he hadn't shot Blessing. He was clear enough to know that, he said. Personally, I doubted it. He was a rather good-looking fellow, with a young wife who seemed to be all legs and eyes. She

was probably pretty, but she looked like a corpse, herself, sitting there beside Thistlethwaite at the table.

Ricketts, a thin small man, with a sharp nose and eyes like a cornered rat, rode Murray pretty hard, but the prisoner stood up to it and stuck to his story. They didn't shake him an ounce, not even after the Pearson woman had weakened under Ricketts' battering.

This Pearson woman was one of the star witnesses for the defense, or was supposed to be; but she wasn't strong enough for Ricketts' bullying, and after a while nobody could tell whose witness she was. She was a plump little, peering sort of old lady, the sort that *would* see everything that was going on around her, and tell about it, too. Her story, on direct examination, was clear enough, although she had to be coached a little. She had been sitting at her window, in Lambeth Avenue, waiting for her husband to come home— He *wasn't* one of the "boys," she snapped, when Ricketts interrupted—and she had seen two men pass her window, a short time before the shooting. She had heard them quarreling—violently. One of them was waving his arms. She had taken particular notice of them, and she was sure that neither of the men was James Murray; they were both much bigger men. She was also pretty sure that one of them *was* Howard Blessing. It was pretty dark, she admitted on cross-examination, but she saw them quite clearly, because there was a light not very far from her house. She had heard their voices, too, and neither one of them sounded like the voice of James Murray.

Then Ricketts exploded a couple of bombs. He was particularly sarcastic on the subject of Murray's voice, but there was no need for his being so brutal with her. Even the boobs on the jury had noticed all *he* had. The woman was hard of hearing. She was all right when Thistlethwaite had her, for he kept his voice up—it's pretty high, anyway—and she knew what he was going to ask; but Ricketts turned her inside out. What she had to tell wasn't so much, but it was less when Ricketts had finished with her. He kept his voice down on purpose, and all the time she was saying "What?" and "How?" and putting

her hands up to her ears. First of all, he made her admit that she hadn't heard the shots. Thistlethwaite had carefully kept away from that question. And in the end, Ricketts forced her to confess that she wasn't very sure of anything. She *might* have made a mistake. She couldn't *swear* that one of the voices she had heard was *not* Murray's. The man she had taken for Howard Blessing *might* have been someone else.

The things Ricketts said can be imagined. She hadn't even heard the shots, a quarter of a block away; she couldn't even hear his questions right there in the courtroom; and yet she could testify about the voices of two men passing her window! And, of course, he looked over at us, triumphantly, every time he made a point. The woman was nearly crying. Thistlethwaite got her again, as quickly as he could, and tried to soothe her. He managed to bring out that the immediate reason for her poor hearing was a cold in her head, whereas on the night of the voices her head had been clearer; but even the judge grinned at that.

The other defense ace was a janitor who had seen a man running. That was all. The man who was running had been seen by the janitor, on Lambeth Avenue, some blocks from the scene of the shooting, not long after it had occurred. The suggestion there, of course, was that this running man had shot Howard Blessing and then taken to his heels. Which was all right as far as it went; but it didn't explain James Murray, standing there on the spot with a revolver in his hand, and three of the chambers empty.

III

However, the defense had a trump card that even Ricketts couldn't beat. Blessing, a widower, always carried around with him a miniature portrait of his wife. All his friends knew this, and some of them testified about it; one of them swore he had seen it in Blessing's possession the very night of Blessing's death. Blessing had shown it

to him, in the friend's home, just before he—Blessing, that is—started for his own home on the trip that he never finished. And the miniature was missing. It hadn't been found on Murray, and it hadn't been found in the neighborhood of the murder; and it hadn't been found on Blessing's body.

It was a lovely point, and it hinted at all sorts of things. It furnished just about the only hint of romance the case had, and the newspapers had played it strong, from the beginning. Pictures of the girl—Blessing's wife—were in every edition. Every man on the jury knew what she looked like, although she had been dead for some years. Thistlethwaite, of course, made the most of that missing miniature. Ricketts just shrugged it out of existence, as if it didn't matter, anyway.

I suppose nearly everybody believed Murray to be guilty, and probably everybody thought something discreditable was being hidden, or wasn't known; something that would connect Murray with Blessing's dead wife, or something that would connect Blessing with Murray's wife. I heard some pretty rough guesses made in the jury room, myself, the first night out.

From the beginning, Thistlethwaite stuck to one story. It wasn't much of a story to impress a jury, but it was all he had, and he did what he could with it, which was a lot. Everything he brought out contributed to it, and finally got into his plea to the jury. He knew that his only chance to clear Murray was a great speech, and when the time came he made it. The fellow certainly could talk. He was tall and thin, and would have been good-looking if his face hadn't been pock-marked. His hair had a curl and a wave that was the envy of every woman in the courtroom —and they were there in regiments. He looked like an actor, and he should have been one. He won most of his cases. That's why he was in this one. Without Thistlethwaite, Murray wouldn't have had a chance.

Well, it was my first jury service, and I listened for all I was worth. I was interested in the case, anyway, as I said, and had my own opinions about it. It was as good as a

vaudeville show, sometimes, to watch Ricketts and Thistlethwaite in action, particularly when they got after each other. Ricketts was a snarly, sarcastic little devil, and sharp as a whip. I remember once when Thistlethwaite was going after Witte pretty strong, early in the trial, about the exact minute he had heard the shots, and just where Murray was standing with reference to the body, and what the position of the moon was, and so on, Ricketts smiled out of the corner of his face, with one eye on the jury, and said: "Apparently it is Mr. Whistlewhite's idea that we have erred in failing to call the moon as an essential witness in this case."

Everybody snickered at the name, as usual, then everybody roared; and the bailiff pounded and howled for order, although he was grinning like a black comedian himself. Thistlethwaite's only reply was: "I should have been very glad, Mr. Prosecutor, had it been possible, to call the moon as a witness for the defense. I have no doubt that its long experience as an eye-witness would have enabled it to interpret what it saw, more correctly than the human eyes of Officer Witte." Which wasn't so good, I imagine, for nobody laughed.

Later, though, Thistlethwaite got a chance to compare the combination of Ricketts' voice and Ricketts' argument with a jew's harp, and all the defense followers cheered up and chuckled. And, of course, whenever anything of that sort was sprung, we in the jury box got a smile and a glance from the orator who was doing the talking. That sort of thing is always for the benefit of the jury. We didn't any of us like Ricketts, but he had Murray dead to rights, and he knew it, and we knew it. Not that Thistlethwaite was popular in the jury room; he wasn't. He was a bit too oily, and half the time he was over the heads of—well, say eleven of us. But on the whole, I think we liked him better than we did Ricketts—maybe because he had a losing case and was putting up a good fight.

Sometimes the two of them wrangled together over nothing in particular until the judge, who always looked half asleep when he wasn't drawing heads or something on his

blotter, would get tired of it and ask them to get along with the case. Sometimes the judge called a recess when the razzing was getting pretty furious, and when he came back from his chambers he would always have a fresh chew of tobacco in his cheek. He had a chopped moustache, and reminded me of a veterinary surgeon I used to know.

IV

After the evidence was all in, the main talking began, as I said. Ricketts, sneery as ever, talked as if it was all over but the shouting. The newspapers called him a "hanging prosecutor," and it was a hanging he wanted in this case. He drew a lot of inferences that weren't justified by the evidence, it seemed to me, to give Murray a motive for the crime; but there wasn't much that it was necessary for him to say. His case was complete when Witte finished giving his testimony. Murray had been caught red-handed, whatever his motives may have been, and that was that. He had taken a human life, and the law demanded his own in return. A silly idea, but there are a lot of silly ideas in the world, parading as wisdom.

Thistlethwaite, of course, took another tone. He was bitter when he referred to Ricketts' conduct of the case; but for the most part he delivered an address that might have come out of a Sunday serial. He pictured Murray as a victim of circumstances, a man of fine reputation who was to be blamed only because he was fool enough to get drunk and stagger into a mess. Considering the little he had to build on, his story was a good one. You could see the whole scene the way he described it: Murray, so fuddled he didn't know what was going on, meandering home the wrong way, probably making speeches to the moon, blundering onto the body of Howard Blessing a minute or two after the shooting, seeing the revolver on the ground beside the body, picking it up like an idiot, and finally standing there dazed as Witte came up and arrested him. Meanwhile, Thistlethwaite said, the real murderer

was fleeing for his life, making a clean getaway, seen only by an owl janitor who hadn't even caught a glimpse of the runner's face.

In support of Thistlethwaite's reconstruction, we had, of course, the janitor's slender testimony, and the evidence of the Pearson woman, as much of it as hadn't been laughed out of court. I always believed, myself, that she *did* hear the voices she said she did. The men were quarreling, and their voices probably were pretty high.

Finally, Thistlethwaite continued, there was the matter of the missing miniature. It completely exonerated Murray, he contended. It had to be either on Blessing or Murray, if Murray was the murderer; there hadn't been time for Murray to throw it away or hide it. So he ran on, and it was a first class speech. He pointed to Murray's blameless life, and his distinguished friends, and wanted to know why under the canopy a man who had never handled a revolver in his life, should on this occasion beg, borrow, or steal one and murder a man he had never seen or heard of before.

Oh, it was a masterpiece of a talk; but as Ricketts pointed out in his final address, it was all pure guesswork. In spite of everything anybody could say, one *fact* remained unshaken—James Murray, standing over his victim on the corner, with the discharged revolver in his hand.

As for Murray's drunkenness, Ricketts said, it was no excuse. He was willing to admit that in cold sobriety Murray might not have lost his temper and Blessing might have gone on living. It was absurd to assert, however, that there had been no quarrel between them. Whatever their differences may have been, they were obviously enemies. If we, the jury, believed that drunkenness excused cold-blooded murder, he added sarcastically, then we would, of course, acquit Murray and thereby encourage others to get drunk and go man-hunting; but if we believed that human life should be protected against the insanity of drunken beasts, whatever their reputations when sober, it was our duty to make an example of this particularly obnoxious

specimen. And so on. It wasn't as picturesque a speech as Thistlethwaite's, but it carried a lot more conviction.

As a matter of fact, as far as the other eleven jurors were concerned, Murray's goose was cooked long before the final addresses. I knew that. Even the eyes and legs of Mrs. Murray hadn't helped much.

Then the judge adjusted his nose-glasses and shoved his stomach up against the corner of the bench, and read his instructions, which were a fair enough summing up of what we had heard from both sides. On the whole, the instructions were a bit favorable to the prosecution, which was to be expected; but we were told that if we entertained—that was the word—a reasonable doubt of Murray's guilt, it was up to us to acquit him of the charge. After that we paraded to the jury room, and the real trial of the case began.

V

A smug animal named Dean, a printing superintendent somewhere, was our foreman, and he was as important about it as if he had been appointed minister to Dublin. Dean had served on juries before, although he'd never been a foreman until now, and he knew the ropes. We began by taking a trial ballot, just to see where we stood, and the vote was eleven for conviction and one for acquittal.

I knew who the *one* was, and I didn't see any reason for leaving the others in doubt.

"I'm the fellow, boys," I said. "Try to convince me."

They did. Dean in particular seemed to take it as a personal quarrel with him that I had. He seemed to think it inconsiderate of me to hold an opinion opposed to the views of eleven others. He had an idea that if we had all been agreed, somehow it would have been a feather in his cap to report right back to the judge, like a bunch of boy scouts who had finished an assignment. The others thought it was funny, at first, and were chiefly interested to know my reasons for believing Murray innocent. They hadn't seen a chance for him at any time, they said. They were

kind of sorry for him, but not much. As for his being innocent—!

"It's an open-and-shut case, Russell," one of them said. "Thistlethwaite made a good talk, all right, but he didn't have a single fact. It was all moonshine. I wouldn't hustle anybody off to the gallows, or even to the pen, if I had any doubts; but I haven't—not a doubt. This guy's going to get what is coming to him. He's as guilty as Judas Iscariot."

"He's being framed," I said. "He was drunk, and he happened along at the right time, and the murderer used him. That's the way I figure it. Thistlethwaite thinks Murray came along and saw the gun, and like a damn fool picked it up, just in time to get caught with it. I think the murderer stuck the gun into Murray's hand, just before he ran off himself. No wonder Murray was dazed!"

"Bunk!" said one of the others. "He was dazed because he was soused. He planned it all in cold blood, then licked up a lot of liquor to give him nerve to see it through."

"You *think* Murray knew Blessing?" I asked. And they all answered at once: "Sure thing!"

"There wasn't any testimony to show it," I said. "Ricketts just said that. There wasn't any proof."

"There didn't have to be," Dean said. "It stuck out all through the case. Why would he want to shoot him if he didn't know him?"

"That's what Thistlethwaite wanted to know," I told him. "He wouldn't—and he didn't. That's the answer. And how about the miniature?"

"He didn't have it on him," said Dean, meaning Blessing didn't have it on him. "Ricketts had the dope on that. He couldn't have had it on him. The fellow who said he did was probably lying."

"Lying, your grandmother," I said. "He saw it half an hour before Blessing was shot. If that miniature could be located, we'd know a lot more about this case than we do now, and Murray wouldn't be in danger of swinging."

"If your grandmother had four wheels she'd be a box car," said Dean.

"You fellows are just sore at Murray because he's a reformer who got drunk," I said. "I don't blame you for that, but it's no reason for supposing he committed murder."

"That's a lie," said Dean. "Anyway, it's a good reason, in my opinion."

So it went, off and on, for ten days. We picked that case to pieces. We went over every bit of testimony. And it ended just the way it began. Everybody but me wanted to convict Murray, and most of them wanted him hung. The longer we were out, the sorer they all got at Murray —and, of course, at me. They hated me like poison. They probably thought I'd been fixed, and was holding out on orders.

One of them—Dean—started to say something about it, one day, but I said some things that quieted him for a couple of hours. In one way, I had the whip hand. I didn't have any family waiting for me at home, and all the others had. They were all married men, and they were pretty sick about being kept away from home, after they'd been out a few days. At first, they had all thought it was a great lark.

I didn't care how long we were out. I knew it was my job to save Murray's neck. Not that I cared a hoot about Murray, but I was positive he was as innocent of the murder as Dean himself. Every once in a while the judge would send his bailiff in to see how we stood and whether there was any chance of our reaching a verdict. I thought a number of times he would call it a mistrial and discharge the jury, but he didn't. Eleven to one sounded pretty good to him, I guess. He figured that sooner or later I would cave, and there would be a verdict for the state.

VI

The bailiff used to take a hand in the argument, sometimes. He thought I was a stubborn ass, and didn't hesitate to say so. He said he had heard all the evidence, too, and he was sure Murray was guilty.

"What do you care whether he swings or not?" he asked. "It ain't your funeral. Come on, boys, let's get a verdict, and we'll all go home." At other times he would say: "What do you think you are, Russell? Chief justice or something? What right have you to say this man isn't guilty when these eleven men say he is? Do you think your brains are better than other people's?"

So it went. They didn't budge me an inch. I argued right back, and went over the whole ground with them like a teacher, time and again. And I didn't budge them an inch, either.

After a while they began to get even with me. The bailiff was at the bottom of that, I think. The other eleven used to have cigars, all of a sudden, when I didn't; and a couple of times I thought my food wasn't quite up to scratch, though it all came from the same hotel kitchen. Then one night somebody upset a pitcher of water in my bed, just before I had to use it; and my clothes used to disappear mysteriously, a few minutes before I needed them. I was taken over the jumps, all right. It was a regular initiation. It narrowed down, at last, to a survival contest. Nobody spoke to me, and I didn't speak to anybody. Any one of them would have been glad to take a punch at me, and a few times I thought some of them were going to do it. And every once in a while Dean would call for another ballot, just to see whether I had changed my mind.

Well, the eleventh morning rolled around, and the ratio was still eleven to one. The judge's bailiff came in and dropped a hint. He said if we didn't reach a verdict that day we were going to be discharged. He may have been lying; I don't know; but that's what he said. Everybody cheered up but me. It was going to be over soon, one way or another, they figured. They weren't so angry at me that morning.

When I still held out, they just laughed a little, and Dean said: "Well, you certainly stuck it out, Russell. I've got to hand it to you."

"Thanks!" I said.

But I wasn't pleased at all. A discharge of the jury meant another trial for Murray, probably, and I knew that next time he wouldn't have someone like me on the jury to save his neck. I thought it all over, and there was only one thing to do; so after dinner I did it.

"Boys," I said, "or gentlemen, if you like, the time has come to end all this funny business. We haven't been able to agree, and it looks as if the judge is going to let us disagree. That doesn't suit me, for I believe Murray is innocent. I don't want another jury to convict him. I want this jury to free him. Last night, I went over this case pretty carefully, and I can tell you just what happened that night on that street corner, as clearly as if I was there. Maybe I dreamed it; maybe I just figured it out; but this is the way it goes. . . .

"About ten years ago, let's imagine there was a man named Smith—call him George Smith. Suppose he fell in love with a girl, and that it was an honest-to-God thing. Maybe he was an electrician, or something like that, in a small town in Ohio, where the girl lived. Anyway, I imagine he didn't have money enough to get married, so he and the girl just drifted along, liking each other a lot, and hoping that some day it would be all right. He would have taken a chance, and so would the girl; but suppose her father was dead against it. Then suppose Smith got a chance to make some money—good money—in another city, and went away. The girl, of course, was going to wait for him, and maybe she would have waited, if it hadn't been for another fellow. Suppose this other fellow was a hardware salesman, a fellow who made that town every once in a while, a flashy, good-looking young fellow, with enough money to make it look like it was more than it was. Then suppose he took a fancy to this girl, too, and that his name was Howard Blessing."

That gave them all a shock. At first they hadn't known what I was talking about. Now they began to prick up their ears and look at each other.

"Well," I said, "suppose all that, and the rest ought to be easy to guess. It's the sort of thing that happens in life

a lot oftener than you think. What happens? As soon as Smith is out of the way. Blessing begins to work on the girl. He fills her up with a lot of stories about Smith, some of them pretty tough; and, with the girl's father to help him, it isn't long before Smith isn't getting any answer to his letters. Then, one day, he gets a letter from the girl that knocks him over. Maybe it's a year after he's gone away; about the time he's thinking about going back to marry her. And she says she's going to marry Blessing.

"There's the situation, and you can't blame the girl altogether, because Blessing is a good plausible liar, and Smith isn't there to defend himself. There isn't anything Smith can do, is there? He can't figure it out, of course, because he doesn't know all the dirty stories Blessing has been telling about him. Maybe it doesn't break his heart exactly, because men's hearts don't break easily; but it makes him pretty mad. He already hates Blessing, who is a pup. Smith has always known that, the way men know about each other. All right! Smith stays on where he is, and after a time he gets the wedding announcement, and that's that. The chapter's over. That's what Smith thinks; and probably that's what Blessing thinks."

VII

Well, I had them, all right. The story got them, as I thought maybe it would. They began to smell a rat. But Dean wasn't letting me get away with too much. "That's very pretty," he said. "You ought to write a story about it, Russell. You've sure got an imagination. But what's it got to do with Murray?"

"Let me finish," I said. "Maybe I'm only supposing a case, but you'll find it fits the facts. What happens afterwards? You don't need three guesses to know that. The years begin to run, and after enough of them have gone by, one day Smith gets a letter from the girl's mother. She's always liked Smith, and she writes to tell him that her daughter—that is, Mrs. Blessing—is dead. She doesn't

beat around the bush for words, either, and what she has to say about Blessing is plenty. He's everything that Smith already knows, and then some. The old woman is broken-hearted, and she's mad—both of them. She writes to Smith because she's got to write to somebody. And, of course, it's the old story again—as old as what happened to Smith. Blessing hadn't panned out very well, and when he'd got to running around with other women, it was the finish for the girl. But instead of getting a divorce, the girl commits suicide, being that kind of a girl. She must have had a terrible time, to do that. Maybe you can imagine her. She probably looked like the pictures you've seen of Mrs. Blessing.

"Well," I said, "now you've got the beginning of the story. Smith, of course, writes a letter to the old woman, trying to buck her up; and privately he tells himself what he's going to do to Blessing if he ever meets him. Because Blessing has killed the girl just as surely as if he had knifed her. They don't call it murder, maybe, but that's what it is. Isn't it?"

About half of them nodded their heads; and I was pretty glad they were all married men. Probably some of them had daughters; I don't know.

"The girl's mother, you see, has spilled the beans," I went on, "and Smith knows now how Blessing happened to cut him out. And the end of the story, of course, is what happened the night Smith met Blessing at Lambeth Avenue and Belvedere Road; the night Mrs. Pearson was looking out of her window, and didn't have a cold in her head. It was a long time after the girl had died, of course, and Smith and Blessing had met once before that, but Blessing had got away. He ran. That's how Smith knew Blessing was in the same city as himself, this city in which we're sitting now. If Blessing had known it in time, he'd probably have shipped for Africa. That's the sort of a coward he was."

By this time the whole eleven of them were listening with both ears, for they had tumbled to the fact that I knew Smith and knew his story; they knew I *must*. Well,

I did. Even so, one of them sneered a bit, and said: "You seem to know a lot about it!"

"I do!" I said, and went on with the story:

"The second time Smith met Blessing was that night, and Blessing was ready. He'd got a gun, apparently, and carried it every night after that first meeting. He wasn't taking any chances. Smith didn't have a gun. He didn't intend to kill Blessing. He just intended to thrash him within an inch of his life. They met, accidentally, and Blessing began to argue—to justify himself. That's what the Pearson woman heard as the two of them passed her window. But Smith was cold. He knew what he was going to do; but he let Blessing talk, to see what he'd say. Finally, Blessing produced his miniature, and began to sob about it; and that was the last straw. Smith knocked it out of his hands and swung on him. And Blessing ducked and got out his gun. He didn't get a chance to use it, for Smith grabbed him and took that away from him, too. The gun went off in the air, just as Smith got it. That was the first shot. Then there were two more.

"I'm not trying to justify Smith, exactly. Something happened to him, just then, and maybe he wasn't responsible. Maybe you think he *was*. He let Blessing have it, just as Blessing jumped for him. It was all over in a minute, and Smith was a murderer. That sort of thing happens in life, too. It isn't intended, there isn't any plan; it just happens because you're mad, and somebody has it coming to him. Something pops inside of you, and there you are. It might be you; it might be me. This time it was Smith."

Dean got the floor, then, for a minute. He had listened hard, and now he had a question to ask. "Who is Smith?" he wanted to know. "Is he—Murray?"

"No," I said, "he's the fellow the janitor saw running. I told you Murray was framed, and so he was. He came up just in time to be useful. He came up staggering, drunk; and he stopped and looked around to see what was going on. And Smith, who was pretty horrified by

what he'd done, and had to get away quick, shoved the gun into Murray's hand, grabbed the miniature off the sidewalk, and ran. When Witte came up, a few minutes later—it took him longer than he thought—there was Murray standing over the body of Blessing, holding the gun, too drunk to know what was going on; wondering what it was all about. He said he was innocent, when he got his wits back, but he hadn't a leg to stand on.

"Now," I said, "that's what happened, that night, and there's only one thing for us to do, and that's acquit Murray."

They didn't say a word for a while. They couldn't. They just sat—or stood—and looked at me. Finally, Dean had an idea—another one. He stood up and aimed his finger at me.

"Russell," he said, "it's a good story, and if it's true, of course it goes without saying that you know this fellow Smith. Well, that's all right; though how you got onto the jury, I don't know. But it needs a lot more than your word to prove it. We'll free Murray—sure!—as soon as we know *you* know what you're talking about. If you're just making up a fairy tale, to get Murray off . . ."

Well, that was that. I knew again what I had to do. "All right, Dean," I said. "What would you consider was proof?"

He thought a minute. "If you could produce this fellow Smith," he said at last, "it would be something, eh, boys? But even then, Smith would have to produce the miniature, I guess, to prove that *he* was telling the truth. Yes, I guess the miniature is the only real proof. Eh, boys?"

They all agreed with him. They always agreed with everybody and with each other—with everybody except me.

"All right then," I said again, "but the question is: what about Smith? Does he have to take Murray's place? You know the truth about him. Do you want him to go to the gallows for killing Blessing? If you

tell the court about Smith, he has to take *his* chance in the dock, and maybe get a jury that wouldn't understand him the way this one does. Assume that all I've told you is true, and that you're sitting in judgment on Smith. Would you free him or convict him?"

"Free him," said about four of them at once. The others hadn't thought about it; but I could see the answer in their faces. They wouldn't have hanged Smith. He had done the sort of thing every one of them knew he might have done himself. I chanced it.

"There's the miniature, boys," I said, pulling it out of my coat. "Take a look at it. I've had it in my pocket ever since that night. Then take a look at me. I'm Smith."

They had to believe it. It was true. There was the miniature, and they knew the face. It had been in all the papers. They looked at it for a while, then at me, and then out of the window. For a minute I felt the rope around my neck. But I had read their minds. They were a bit stunned, but they believed me. They were ashamed of the things they had hinted about Mrs. Blessing, that first day out. It was all right. All they wanted was for someone to say the right thing, and finally a little wrinkled fellow, who had been one of the craziest to hang Murray, said it.

"Don't be scared," he said, good naturedly. "Nobody's going to tell on you. Come on, you fellows. This is the last ballot. Not guilty—and that goes for Russell, too!"

I can tell about it now. It was a long time ago; and I'm a long way off.

MAURICE LEBLANC

ON THE TOP OF THE TOWER

HORTENSE DANIEL pushed her window ajar and whispered:

"Are you there, Rossigny?"

"I am here," replied a voice from the shrubbery at the front of the house.

Leaning forward, she saw a rather fat man looking up at her out of a gross red face with its cheeks and chin set in unpleasantly fair whiskers.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well, I had a great argument with my uncle and aunt last night. They absolutely refuse to sign the document of which my lawyer sent them the draft, or to restore the dowry squandered by my husband."

"But your uncle is responsible by the terms of the marriage settlement."

"No matter. He refuses."

"Well, what do you propose to do?"

"Are you still determined to run away with me?" she asked, with a laugh.

"More so than ever."

"Your intentions are strictly honourable, remember!"

"Just as you please. You know that I am madly in love with you."

"Unfortunately I am not madly in love with you!"

"Then what made you choose me?"

"Chance. I was bored. I was growing tired of my humdrum existence. So I'm ready to run risks. . . . Here's my luggage: catch!"

(From "The Eight Strokes of the Clock," by Maurice LeBlanc. Copyright, 1922, by The Macaulay Company, New York.)

She let down from the window a couple of large leather kit-bags. Rossigny caught them in his arms.

"The die is cast," she whispered. "Go and wait for me with your car at the If cross-roads. I shall come on horseback."

"Hang it, I can't run off with your horse!"

"He will go home by himself."

"Capital! . . . Oh, by the way . . ."

"What is it?"

"Who is this Prince Rénine, who's been here the last three days and whom nobody seems to know?"

"I don't know much about him. My uncle met him at a friend's shoot and asked him here to stay."

"You seem to have made a great impression on him. You went for a long ride with him yesterday. He's a man I don't care for."

"In two hours I shall have left the house in your company. The scandal will cool him off . . . Well, we've talked long enough. We have no time to lose."

For a few minutes she stood watching the fat man bending under the weight of her traps as he moved away in the shelter of an empty avenue. Then she closed the window.

Outside, in the park, the huntsmen's horns were sounding the reveille. The hounds burst into frantic baying. It was the opening day of the hunt that morning at the Château de la Marèze, where, every year, in the first week in September, the Comte d'Aigleroche, a mighty hunter before the Lord, and his countess were accustomed to invite a few personal friends and the neighbouring landowners.

Hortense slowly finished dressing, put on a riding-habit, which revealed the lines of her supple figure, and a wide-brimmed felt hat, which encircled her lovely face and auburn hair, and sat down to her writing-desk, at which she wrote to her uncle, M. d'Aigleroche, a farewell letter to be delivered to him that evening. It was a difficult letter to word; and, after beginning it several times, she ended by giving up the idea.

"I will write to him later," she said to herself, "when his anger has cooled down."

And she went downstairs to the dining-room.

Enormous logs were blazing in the hearth of the lofty room. The walls were hung with trophies of rifles and shotguns. The guests were flocking in from every side, shaking hands with the Comte d'Aigleroche, one of those typical country squires, heavily and powerfully built, who lives only for hunting and shooting. He was standing before the fire greeting each new arrival.

Hortense kissed him absently and turned to Prince Rénine who claimed her attention. He was a young man, very smartly dressed, with a narrow and rather pale face, whose eyes held by turns the gentlest and the harshest, the most friendly and the most satirical expression. He bowed to her, kissed her hand and said:

"May I remind you of your kind promise, dear madame?"

"My promise?"

"Yes, we agreed that we should repeat our delightful excursion of yesterday and try to go over that old boarded-up place the look of which made us so curious. It seems to be known as the Domaine de Halingre."

She answered a little curtly:

"I'm extremely sorry, monsieur, but it would be rather far and I'm feeling a little done up. I shall go for a canter in the park and come indoors again."

There was a pause. Then Serge Rénine said, smiling, with his eyes fixed on hers and in a voice which she alone could hear:

"I am sure that you'll keep your promise and that you'll let me come with you. It would be better."

"For whom? For you, you mean?"

"For you, too, I assure you."

She coloured slightly, but did not reply, shook hands with a few people around her and left the room.

A groom was holding the horse at the foot of the steps. She mounted and set off towards the woods beyond the park.

It was a cool, still morning. Through the leaves, which

barely quivered, the sky showed crystalline blue. Hortense rode at a walk down winding avenues which in half an hour brought her to a countryside of ravines and bluffs intersected by the high-road.

She stopped. There was not a sound. Rossigny must have stopped his engine and concealed the car in the thickets around the If cross-roads.

She was five hundred yards at most from that circular space. After hesitating for a few seconds, she dismounted, tied her horse carelessly, so that he could release himself by the least effort and return to the house, shrouded her face in the long brown veil that hung over her shoulders and walked on.

As she expected, she saw Rossigny directly she reached the first turn in the road. He ran up to her and drew her into the coppice!

"Quick, quick! Oh, I was so afraid that you would be late . . . or even change your mind! And here you are! It seems too good to be true!"

She smiled:

"You appear to be quite happy to do an idiotic thing!"

"I should think I *am* happy! And so will you be, I swear you will! Your life will be one long fairy-tale. You shall have every luxury, and all the money you can wish for."

"I want neither money nor luxuries."

"What then?"

"Happiness."

"You can safely leave your happiness to me."

She replied, jestingly:

"I rather doubt the quality of the happiness which you would give me."

"Wait! You'll see! You'll see!"

They had reached the motor. Rossigny, still stammering expressions of delight, started the engine. Hortense stepped in and wrapped herself in a wide cloak. The car followed the narrow, grassy path which led back to the cross-roads and Rossigny was accelerating the speed, when he was suddenly forced to pull up. A shot had rung out from the

neighbouring wood, on the right. The car was swerving from side to side.

"A front tire burst," shouted Rossigny, leaping to the ground.

"Not a bit of it!" cried Hortense. "Somebody fired!"

"Impossible, my dear! Don't be so absurd!"

At that moment, two slight shocks were felt and two more reports were heard, one after the other, some way off and still in the wood.

Rossigny snarled:

"The back tires burst now . . . both of them. . . . But who, in the devil's name, can the ruffian be? . . . Just let me get hold of him, that's all! . . ."

He clambered up the road-side slope. There was no one there. Moreover, the leaves of the coppice blocked the view.

He swore violently. "You were right: somebody was firing at the car! Oh, this is a bit thick! We shall be held up for hours! Three tires to mend! . . . But what are you doing, dear girl?"

Hortense herself had alighted from the car. She ran to him, greatly excited:

"I'm going."

"But why?"

"I want to know. Some one fired. I want to know who it was."

"Don't let us separate, please!"

"Do you think I'm going to wait here for you for hours?"

"What about your running away? . . . All our plans . . .?"

"We'll discuss that to-morrow. Go back to the house. Take back my things with you. . . . And good-bye for the present."

She hurried, left him, had the good luck to find her horse and set off at a gallop in a direction leading away from La Marèze.

There was not the least doubt in her mind that the three shots had been fired by Prince Rénine.

"It was he," she muttered, angrily, "it was he. No one else would be capable of such behaviour."

Besides, he had warned her, in his smiling, masterful way, that he would expect her.

She was weeping with rage and humiliation. At that moment, had she found herself face to face with Prince Rénine, she could have struck him with her riding-whip.

Before her was the rugged and picturesque stretch of country which lies between the Orne and the Sarthe, above Alençon, and which is known as Little Switzerland. Steep hills compelled her frequently to moderate her pace, the more so as she had to cover some six miles before reaching her destination. But, though the speed at which she rode became less headlong, though her physical effort gradually slackened, she nevertheless persisted in her indignation against Prince Rénine. She bore him a grudge not only for the unspeakable action of which he had been guilty, but also for his behaviour to her during the last three days, his persistent attentions, his assurance, his air of excessive politeness.

She was nearly there. In the bottom of a valley, an old park-wall, full of cracks and covered with moss and weeds, revealed the ball-turret of a chateau and a few windows with closed shutters. This was the Domaine de Halingre.

She followed the wall and turned a corner. In the middle of the crescent-shaped space before which lay the entrance-gates, Serge Rénine stood waiting beside his horse.

She sprang to the ground, and, as he stepped forward, hat in hand, thanking her for coming, she cried:

"One word, monsieur, to begin with. Something quite inexplicable happened just now. Three shots were fired at a motor-car in which I was sitting. Did you fire those shots?"

"Yes."

She seemed dumbfounded:

"Then you confess it?"

"You have asked a question, madame, and I have answered it."

"But how dared you? What gave you the right?"

"I was not exercising a right, madame; I was performing a duty!"

"Indeed! And what duty, pray?"

"The duty of protecting you against a man who is trying to profit by your troubles."

"I forbid you to speak like that. I am responsible for my own actions, and I decided upon them in perfect liberty."

"Madame, I overheard your conversation with M. Rossigny this morning and it did not appear to me that you were accompanying him with a light heart. I admit the ruthlessness and bad taste of my interference and I apologise for it humbly; but I risked being taken for a ruffian in order to give you a few hours for reflection."

"I have reflected fully, monsieur. When I have once made up my mind to a thing, I do not change it."

"Yes, madame, you do sometimes. If not, why are you here instead of there?"

Hortense was confused for a moment. All her anger had subsided. She looked at Rénine with the surprise which one experiences when confronted with certain persons who are unlike their fellows, more capable of performing unusual actions, more generous and disinterested. She realised perfectly that he was acting without any ulterior motive or calculation, that he was, as he had said, merely fulfilling his duty as a gentleman to a woman who has taken the wrong turning.

Speaking very gently, he said:

"I know very little about you, madame, but enough to make me wish to be of use to you. You are twenty-six years old and have lost both your parents. Seven years ago, you became the wife of the Comte d'Aigleroche's nephew by marriage, who proved to be of unsound mind, half insane indeed, and had to be confined. This made it impossible for you to obtain a divorce and compelled you, since your dowry had been squandered, to live with your uncle and at his expense. It's a depressing environment. The count and countess do not agree. Years ago, the count

was deserted by his first wife, who ran away with the countess' first husband. The abandoned husband and wife decided out of spite to unite their fortunes, but found nothing but disappointment and ill-will in this second marriage. And you suffer the consequences. They lead a monotonous, narrow, lonely life for eleven months or more out of the year. One day, you met M. Rossigny, who fell in love with you and suggested an elopement. You did not care for him. But you were bored, your youth was being wasted, you longed for the unexpected, for adventure . . . in a word, you accepted with the very definite intention of keeping your admirer at arm's length, but also with the rather ingenuous hope that the scandal would force your uncle's hand and make him account for his trusteeship and assure you of an independent existence. That is how you stand. At present you have to choose between placing yourself in M. Rossigny's hands . . . or trusting yourself to me."

She raised her eyes to his. What did he mean? What was the purport of this offer which he made so seriously, like a friend who asks nothing but to prove his devotion?

After a moment's silence, he took the two horses by the bridle and tied them up. Then he examined the heavy gates, each of which was strengthened by two planks nailed cross-wise. An electoral poster, dated twenty years earlier, showed that no one had entered the domain since that time.

Rénine tore up one of the iron posts which supported a railing that ran round the crescent and used it as a lever. The rotten planks gave way. One of them uncovered the lock, which he attacked with a big knife, containing a number of blades and implements. A minute later, the gate opened on a waste of bracken which led up to a long, dilapidated building, with a turret at each corner and a sort of a belvedere, built on a taller tower, in the middle.

The Prince turned to Hortense:

"You are in no hurry," he said. "You will form your decision this evening; and, if M. Rossigny succeeds in persuading you for the second time, I give you my word of

honour that I shall not cross your path. Until then, grant me the privilege of your company. We made up our minds yesterday to inspect the chateau. Let us do so. Will you? It is as good a way as any of passing the time and I have a notion that it will not be uninteresting."

He had a way of talking which compelled obedience. He seemed to be commanding and entreating at the same time. Hortense did not even seek to shake off the enervation into which her will was slowly sinking. She followed him to a half-demolished flight of steps at the top of which was a door likewise strengthened by planks nailed in the form of a cross.

Rénine went to work in the same way as before. They entered a spacious hall paved with white and black flagstones, furnished with old sideboards and choir-stalls and adorned with a carved escutcheon which displayed the remains of armorial bearings, representing an eagle standing on a block of stone, all half-hidden behind a veil of cobwebs which hung down over a pair of folding-doors.

"The door of the drawing-room, evidently," said Rénine.

He found this more difficult to open; and it was only by repeatedly charging it with his shoulder that he was able to move one of the doors.

Hortense had not spoken a word. She watched not without surprise this series of forcible entries, which were accomplished with a really masterly skill. He guessed her thoughts and, turning round, said in a serious voice:

"It's child's-play to me. I was a locksmith once."

She seized his arm and whispered:

"Listen!"

"To what?" he asked.

She increased the pressure of her hand, to demand silence. The next moment, he murmured:

"It's really very strange."

"Listen, listen!" Hortense repeated, in bewilderment. "Can it be possible?"

They heard, not far from where they were standing, a sharp sound, the sound of a light tap recurring at regular

intervals; and they had only to listen attentively to recognise the ticking of a clock. Yes, it was this and nothing else that broke the profound silence of the dark room; it was indeed the deliberate ticking, rhythmical as the beat of a metronome, produced by a heavy brass pendulum. That was it! And nothing could be more impressive than the measured pulsation of this trivial mechanism, which by some miracle, some inexplicable phenomenon, had continued to live in the heart of the dead chateau.

"And yet," stammered Hortense, without daring to raise her voice, "no one has entered the house?"

"No one."

"And it is quite impossible for that clock to have kept going for twenty years without being wound up?"

"Quite impossible."

"Then . . . ?"

Serge Rénine opened the three windows and threw back the shutters.

He and Hortense were in a drawing-room, as he had thought; and the room showed not the least sign of disorder. The chairs were in their places. Not a piece of furniture was missing. The people who had lived there and who had made it the most individual room in their house had gone away leaving everything just as it was, the books which they used to read, the knicknacks on the tables and consoles.

Rénine examined the old grandfather's clock, contained in its tall carved case which showed the disk of the pendulum through an oval pane of glass. He opened the door of the clock. The weights hanging from the cords were at their lowest point.

At that moment there was a click. The clock struck eight with a serious note which Hortense was never to forget.

"How extraordinary!" she said.

"Extraordinary indeed," said he, "for the works are exceedingly simple and would hardly keep going for a week."

"And do you see nothing out of the common?"

"No, nothing . . . or, at least . . ."

He stooped and, from the back of the case, drew a metal tube which was concealed by the weights. Holding it up to the light:

"A telescope," he said, thoughtfully. "Why did they hide it? . . . And they left it drawn out to its full length. . . . That's odd. . . . What does it mean?"

The clock, as is sometimes usual, began to strike a second time, sounding eight strokes. Rénine closed the case and continued his inspection without putting his telescope down. A wide arch led from the drawing-room to a smaller apartment, a sort of smoking-room. This also was furnished, but contained a glass case for guns of which the rack was empty. Hanging on a panel near by was a calendar with the date of the 5th of September.

"Oh," cried Hortense, in astonishment, "the same date as to-day! . . . They tore off the leaves until the 5th of September. . . . And this is the anniversary! What an astonishing coincidence!"

"Astonishing," he echoed. "It's the anniversary of their departure . . . twenty years ago to-day."

"You must admit," she said, "that all this is incomprehensible."

"Yes, of course . . . but, all the same . . . perhaps not."

"Have you any idea?"

He waited a few seconds before replying:

"What puzzles me is this telescope hidden, dropped in that corner, at the last moment. I wonder what it was used for? . . . From the ground-floor windows you see nothing but the trees in the garden . . . and the same, I expect, from all the windows. . . . We are in a valley, without the least open horizon. . . . To use the telescope, one would have to go up to the top of the house. . . . Shall we go up?"

She did not hesitate. The mystery surrounding the whole adventure excited her curiosity so keenly that she could think of nothing but accompanying Rénine and assisting him in his investigations.

They went upstairs accordingly, and, on the second floor,

came to a landing where they found the spiral staircase leading to the belvedere.

At the top of this was a platform in the open air, but surrounded by a parapet over six feet high.

"There must have been battlements which have been filled in since," observed Prince Rénine. "Look here, there were loop-holes at one time. They may have been blocked."

"In any case," she said, "the telescope was of no use up here either and we may as well go down again."

"I don't agree," he said. "Logic tells us that there must have been some gap through which the country could be seen and this was the spot where the telescope was used."

He hoisted himself by his wrists to the top of the parapet and then saw that this point of vantage commanded the whole of the valley, including the park, with its tall trees marking the horizon; and, beyond, a depression in a wood surmounting a hill, at a distance of some seven or eight hundred yards, stood another tower, squat and in ruins, covered with ivy from top to bottom.

Rénine resumed his inspection. He seemed to consider that the key to the problem lay in the use to which the telescope was put and that the problem would be solved if only they could discover this use.

He studied the loop-holes one after the other. One of them, or rather the place which it had occupied, attracted his attention above the rest. In the middle of the layer of plaster, which had served to block it, there was a hollow filled with earth in which plants had grown. He pulled out the plants and removed the earth, thus clearing the mouth of a hole some five inches in diameter, which completely penetrated the wall. On bending forward, Rénine perceived that this deep and narrow opening inevitably carried the eye, above the dense tops of the trees and through the depression in the hill, to the ivy-clad tower.

At the bottom of this channel, in a sort of groove which ran through it like a gutter, the telescope fitted so exactly that it was quite impossible to shift it, however little, either to the right or to the left.

Rénine, after wiping the outside of the lenses, while taking care not to disturb the lie of the instrument by a hair's breadth, put his eye to the small end.

He remained for thirty or forty seconds, gazing attentively and silently. Then he drew himself up and said, in a husky voice:

"It's terrible . . . it's really terrible."

"What is?" she asked, anxiously.

"Look."

She bent down, but the image was not clear to her and the telescope had to be focussed to suit her sight. The next moment she shuddered and said:

"It's two scarecrows, isn't it, both stuck up on the top? But why?"

"Look again," he said. "Look more carefully . . . under the hats . . . the faces . . ."

"Oh!" she cried, turning faint with horror, "how awful!"

The field of the telescope, like the circular picture shown by a magic lantern, presented this spectacle: the platform of a broken tower, the walls of which were higher in the more distant part and formed as it were a back-drop, over which surged waves of ivy. In front, amid a cluster of bushes, were two human beings, a man and a woman, leaning back against a heap of fallen stones.

But the words man and woman could hardly be applied to these two forms, these two sinister puppets, which, it is true, wore clothes and hats—or rather shreds of clothes and remnants of hats—but had lost their eyes, their cheeks, their chins, every particle of flesh, until they were actually and positively nothing more than two skeletons.

"Two skeletons," stammered Hortense. "Two skeletons with clothes on. Who carried them up there?"

"Nobody."

"But still . . ."

"That man and that woman must have died at the top of the tower, years and years ago . . . and their flesh rotted under their clothes and the ravens ate them."

"But it's hideous, hideous!" cried Hortense, pale as death, her face drawn with horror.

Half an hour later, Hortense Daniel and Rénine left the Château de Halingre. Before their departure, they had gone as far as the ivy-grown tower, the remains of an old donjon-keep more than half demolished. The inside was empty. There seemed to have been a way of climbing to the top, at a comparatively recent period, by means of wooden stairs and ladders which now lay broken and scattered over the ground. The tower backed against the wall which marked the end of the park.

A curious fact, which surprised Hortense, was that Prince Rénine had neglected to pursue a more minute enquiry, as though the matter had lost all interest for him. He did not even speak of it any longer; and, in the inn at which they stopped and took a light meal in the nearest village, it was she who asked the landlord about the abandoned chateau. But she learnt nothing from him, for the man was new to the district and could give her no particulars. He did not even know the name of the owner.

They turned their horses' heads towards La Marèze. Again and again Hortense recalled the squalid sight which had met their eyes. But Rénine, who was in a lively mood and full of attentions to his companion, seemed utterly indifferent to those questions.

"But, after all," she exclaimed, impatiently, "we can't leave the matter there! It calls for a solution."

"As you say," he replied, "a solution is called for. M. Rossigny has to know where he stands and you have to decide what to do about him."

She shrugged her shoulders: "He's of no importance for the moment. The thing to-day . . ."

"Is what?"

"Is to know what those two dead bodies are."

"Still, Rossigny . . ."

"Rossigny can wait. But I can't. You have shown me a mystery which is now the only thing that matters. What do you intend to do?"

"To do?"

"Yes. There are two bodies . . . You'll inform the police, I suppose."

"Gracious goodness!" he exclaimed, laughing. "What for?"

"Well, there's a riddle that has to be cleared up at all costs, a terrible tragedy."

"We don't need any one to do that."

"What! Do you mean to say that you understand it?"

"Almost as plainly as though I had read it in a book, told in full detail, with explanatory illustrations. It's all so simple!"

She looked at him askance, wondering if he was making fun of her. But he seemed quite serious.

"Well?" she asked, quivering with curiosity.

The light was beginning to wane. They had trotted at a good pace; and the hunt was returning as they neared La Marèze.

"Well," he said, "we shall get the rest of our information from people living round about . . . from your uncle, for instance; and you will see how logically all the facts fit in. When you hold the first link of a chain, you are bound, whether you like it or not, to reach the last. It's the greatest fun in the world."

Once in the house, they separated. On going to her room, Hortense found her luggage and a furious letter from Rossigny in which he bade her good-bye and announced his departure.

Then Rénine knocked at her door:

"Your uncle is in the library," he said. "Will you go down with me? I've sent word that I am coming."

She went with him. He added:

"One word more. This morning, when I thwarted your plans and begged you to trust me, I naturally undertook an obligation towards you which I mean to fulfill without delay. I want to give you a positive proof of this."

She laughed:

"The only obligation which you took upon yourself was to satisfy my curiosity."

"It shall be satisfied," he assured her, gravely, "and more fully than you can possibly imagine."

M. d'Aigleroche was alone. He was smoking his pipe

and drinking sherry. He offered a glass to Rénine, who refused.

"Well, Hortense!" he said, in a rather thick voice. "You know that it's pretty dull here, except in these September days. You must make the most of them. Have you had a pleasant ride with Rénine?"

"That's just what I wanted to talk about, my dear sir," interrupted the prince.

"You must excuse me, but I have to go to the station in ten minutes, to meet a friend of my wife's."

"Oh, ten minutes will be ample!"

"Just the time to smoke a cigarette?"

"No longer."

He took a cigarette from the case which M. d'Aigleroche handed to him, lit it and said:

"I must tell you that our ride happened to take us to an old domain which you are sure to know, the Domaine de Halingre."

"Certainly I know it. But it has been closed, boarded up for twenty-five years or so. You weren't able to get in, I suppose?"

"Yes, we were."

"Really? Was it interesting?"

"Extremely. We discovered the strangest things."

"What things?" asked the count, looking at his watch.

Rénine described what they had seen:

"On a tower some way from the house there were two dead bodies, two skeletons rather . . . a man and a woman still wearing the clothes which they had on when they were murdered."

"Come, come, now! Murdered?"

"Yes; and that is what we have come to trouble you about. The tragedy must date back to some twenty years ago. Was nothing known of it at the time?"

"Certainly not," declared the count. "I never heard of any such crime or disappearance."

"Oh, really!" said Rénine, looking a little disappointed. "I hoped to obtain a few particulars."

"I'm sorry."

"In that case, I apologise."

He consulted Hortense with a glance and moved towards the door. But on second thought:

"Could you not at least, my dear sir, bring me into touch with some persons in the neighbourhood, some members of your family, who might know more about it?"

"Of my family? And why?"

"Because the Domaine de Halingre used to belong and no doubt still belongs to the d'Aigleroches. The arms are an eagle on a heap of stones, on a rock. This at once suggested the connection."

This time the count appeared surprised. He pushed back his decanter and his glass of sherry and said:

"What's this you're telling me? I had no idea that we had any such neighbours."

Rénine shook his head and smiled:

"I should be more inclined to believe, sir, that you were not very eager to admit any relationship between yourself . . . and the unknown owner of the property."

"Then he's not a respectable man?"

"The man, to put it plainly, is a murderer."

"What do you mean?"

The count had risen from his chair. Hortense, greatly excited, said:

"Are you really sure that there has been a murder and that the murder was done by some one belonging to the house?"

"Quite sure."

"But why are you so certain?"

"Because I know who the two victims were and what caused them to be killed."

Prince Rénine was making none but positive statements and his method suggested the belief that he was supported by the strongest proofs.

M. d'Aigleroche strode up and down the room, with his hands behind his back. He ended by saying:

"I always had an instinctive feeling that something had happened, but I never tried to find out. . . . Now, as a matter of fact, twenty years ago, a relation of mine, a

distant cousin, used to live at the Domaine de Halingre. I hoped, because of the name I bear, that this story, which, as I say, I never knew but suspected, would remain hidden for ever."

"So this cousin killed somebody?"

"Yes, he was obliged to."

Rénine shook his head:

"I am sorry to have to amend that phrase, my dear sir. The truth, on the contrary, is that your cousin took his victims' lives in cold blood and in a cowardly manner. I never heard of a crime more deliberately and craftily planned."

"What is it that you know?"

The moment had come for Rénine to explain himself, a solemn and anguish-stricken moment, the full gravity of which Hortense understood, though she had not yet divined any part of the tragedy which the prince unfolded step by step.

"It's a very simple story," he said. "There is every reason to believe that M. d'Aigleroche was married and that there was another couple living in the neighbourhood with whom the owner of the Domaine de Halingre were on friendly terms. What happened one day, which of these four persons first disturbed the relations between the two households, I am unable to say. But a likely version, which at once occurs to the mind, is that your cousin's wife, Madame d'Aigleroche, was in the habit of meeting the other husband in the ivy-covered tower, which had a door opening outside the estate. On discovering the intrigue, your cousin d'Aigleroche resolved to be revenged, but in such a manner that there should be no scandal and that no one even should ever know that the guilty pair had been killed. Now he had ascertained—as I did just now—that there was a part of the house, the belvedere, from which you can see, over the trees and the undulations of the park, the tower standing eight hundred yards away, and that this was the only place that overlooked the top of the tower. He therefore pierced a hole in the parapet, through one of the former loop-

holes, and from there, by using a telescope which fitted exactly in the groove which he had hollowed out, he watched the meetings of the two lovers. And it was from there, also, that, after carefully taking all his measurements, and calculating all his distances, on a Sunday, the 5th of September, when the house was empty, he killed them with two shots."

The truth was becoming apparent. The light of day was breaking. The count muttered:

"Yes, that's what must have happened. I expect that my cousin d'Aigleroche . . ."

"The murderer," Rénine continued, "stopped up the loophole neatly with a clod of earth. No one would ever know that two dead bodies were decaying on the top of that tower which was never visited and of which he took the precaution to demolish the wooden stairs. Nothing therefore remained for him to do but to explain the disappearance of his wife and his friend. This presented no difficulty. He accused them of having eloped together."

Hortense gave a start. Suddenly, as though the last sentence were a complete and to her an absolutely unexpected revelation, she understood what Rénine was trying to convey:

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that M. d'Aigleroche accused his wife and his friend of eloping together."

"No, no!" she cried. "I can't allow that! . . . You are speaking of a cousin of my uncle's? Why mix up the two stories?"

"Why mix up this story with another which took place at that time?" said the prince. "But I am not mixing them up, my dear madame; there is only one story and I am telling it as it happened."

Hortense turned to her uncle. He sat silent, with his arms folded; and his head remained in the shadow cast by the lamp-shade. Why had he not protested?

Rénine repeated in a firm tone:

"There is only one story. On the evening of that very

day, the 5th of September at eight o'clock, M. d'Aigleroche, doubtless alleging as his reason that he was going in pursuit of the runaway couple, left his house after boarding up the entrance. He went away, leaving all the rooms as they were and removing only the firearms from their glass case. At the last minute, he had a presentiment, which has been justified to-day, that the discovery of the telescope which had played so great a part in the preparation of his crime might serve as a clue to an enquiry; and he threw it into the clock-case, where, as luck would have it, it interrupted the swing of the pendulum. This unreflecting action, one of those which every criminal inevitably commits, was to betray him twenty years later. Just now, the blows which I struck to force the door of the drawing-room released the pendulum. The clock was set going, struck eight o'clock . . . and I possessed the clue of thread which was to lead me through the labyrinth."

"Proofs!" stammered Hortense. "Proofs!"

"Proofs?" replied Rénine, in a loud voice. "Why, there are any number of proofs; and you know them as well as I do. Who could have killed at that distance of eight hundred yards, except an expert shot, an ardent sportsman? You agree, M. d'Aigleroche, do you not? . . . Proofs? Why was nothing removed from the house, nothing except the guns, those guns which an ardent sportsman cannot afford to leave behind—you agree, M. d'Aigleroche—those guns which we find here, hanging in trophies on the walls! . . . Proofs? What about that date, the 5th of September, which was the date of the crime and which has left such a horrible memory in the criminal's mind that every year at this time—at this time alone—he surrounds himself with distractions and that every year, on this same 5th of September, he forgets his habits of temperance? Well, to-day, is the 5th of September. . . . Proofs? Why, if there weren't any others, would that not be enough for you?"

And Rénine, flinging out his arm, pointed to the Comte d'Aigleroche, who, terrified by this evocation of the

past, had sunk huddled into a chair and was hiding his head in his hands.

Hortense did not attempt to argue with him. She had never liked her uncle, or rather her husband's uncle. She now accepted the accusation laid against him.

Sixty seconds passed. Then M. d'Aigleroche walked up to them and said:

"Whether the story be true or not, you can't call a husband a criminal for avenging his honour and killing his faithless wife."

"No," replied Rénine, "but I have told only the first version of the story. There is another which is infinitely more serious . . . and more probable, one to which a more thorough investigation would be sure to lead."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this. It may not be a matter of a husband taking the law into his own hands, as I charitably supposed. It may be a matter of a ruined man who covets his friend's money and his friend's wife and who, with this object in view, to secure his freedom, to get rid of his friend and of his own wife, draws them into a trap, suggests to them that they should visit that lonely tower and kills them by shooting them from a distance safely under cover."

"No, no," the count protested. "No, all that is untrue."

"I don't say it isn't. I am basing my accusation on proofs, but also on intuitions and arguments which up to now have been extremely accurate. All the same, I admit that the second version may be incorrect. But, if so, why feel any remorse? One does not feel remorse for punishing guilty people."

"One does for taking life. It is a crushing burden to bear."

"Was it to give himself greater strength to bear this burden that M. d'Aigleroche afterwards married his victim's widow? For that, sir, is the crux of the question. What was the motive of that marriage? Was M. d'Aigleroche penniless? Was the woman he was taking as his

second wife rich? Or were they both in love with each other and did M. d'Aigleroche plan with her to kill his first wife and the husband of his second wife? These are problems to which I do not know the answer. They have no interest for the moment; but the police, with all the means at their disposal, would have no great difficulty in elucidating them."

M. d'Aigleroche staggered and had to steady himself against the back of a chair. Livid in the face, he spluttered:

"Are you going to inform the police?"

"No, no," said Rénine. "To begin with, there is the statute of limitations. Then there are twenty years of remorse and dread, a memory which will pursue the criminal to his dying hour, accompanied no doubt by domestic discord, hatred, a daily hell . . . and, in the end, the necessity of returning to the tower and removing the traces of the two murders, the frightful punishment of climbing that tower, of touching those skeletons, of undressing them and burying them. That will be enough. We will not ask for more. We will not give it to the public to batten on and create a scandal which would recoil upon M. d'Aigleroche's niece. No, let us leave this disgraceful business alone."

The count resumed his seat at the table, with his hands clutching his forehead, and asked:

"Then why . . . ?"

"Why do I interfere?" said Rénine. "What you mean is that I must have had some object in speaking. That is so. There must indeed be a penalty, however slight, and our interview must lead to some practical result. But have no fear: M. d'Aigleroche will be let off lightly."

The contest was ended. The count felt that he had only a small formality to fulfil, a sacrifice to accept; and, recovering some of his self-assurance, he said, in an almost sarcastic tone:

"What's your price?"

Rénine burst out laughing:

"Splendid! You see the position. Only, you make a

mistake in drawing me into the business. I'm working for the glory of the thing."

"In that case?"

"You will be called upon at most to make restitution."

"Restitution?"

Rénine leant over the table and said:

"In one of those drawers is a deed awaiting your signature. It is a draft agreement between you and your niece Hortense Daniel, relating to her private fortune, which fortune was squandered and for which you are responsible. Sign the deed."

M. d'Aigleroche gave a start:

"Do you know the amount?"

"I don't wish to know it."

"And if I refuse? . . ."

"I shall ask to see the Comtesse d'Aigleroche."

Without further hesitation, the count opened a drawer, produced a document on stamped paper and quickly signed it:

"Here you are," he said, "and I hope . . ."

"You hope, as I do, that you and I may never have any future dealings? I'm convinced of it. I shall leave this evening; your niece, no doubt, to-morrow. Goodbye."

* * * * * * * * *

In the drawing-room, which was still empty, while the guests at the house were dressing for dinner, Rénine handed the deed to Hortense. She seemed dazed by all that she had heard; and the thing that bewildered her even more than the relentless light shed upon her uncle's past was the miraculous insight and amazing lucidity displayed by this man: the man who for some hours had controlled events and conjured up before her eyes the actual scenes of a tragedy which no one had beheld.

"Are you satisfied with me?" he asked.

She gave him both her hands:

"You have saved me from Rossigny. You have given

me back my freedom and my independence. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"Oh, that's not what I am asking you to say!" he answered. "My first and main object was to amuse you. Your life seemed so humdrum and lacking in the unexpected. Has it been so to-day?"

"How can you ask such a question? I have had the strangest and most stirring experiences."

"That is life," he said. "When one knows how to use one's eyes. Adventure exists everywhere, in the meanest hovel, under the mask of the wisest of men. Everywhere, if you are only willing, you will find an excuse for excitement, for doing good, for saving a victim, for ending an injustice."

Impressed by his power and authority, she murmured: "Who are you exactly?"

"An adventurer. Nothing more. A lover of adventures. Life is not worth living except in moments of adventure, the adventures of others or personal adventures. To-day's has upset you because it affected the innermost depths of your being. But those of others are no less stimulating. Would you like to make the experiment?"

"How?"

"Become the companion of my adventures. If any one calls on me for help, help him with me. If chance or instinct puts me on the track of a crime or the trace of a sorrow, let us both set out together. Do you consent?"

"Yes," she said, "but . . ."

She hesitated, as though trying to guess Rénine's secret intentions.

"But," he said, expressing her thoughts for her, with a smile, "you are a trifle sceptical. What you are saying to yourself is, 'How far does that lover of adventures want to make me go? It is quite obvious that I attract him; and sooner or later he would not be sorry to receive payment for his services.' You are quite right. We must have a formal contract."

"Very formal," said Hortense, preferring to give a jest-

ing tone to the conversation. "Let me hear your proposals."

He reflected for a moment and continued:

"Well, we'll say this. The clock at Halingre gave eight strokes this afternoon, the day of the first adventure. Will you accept its decree and agree to carry out seven more of these delightful enterprises with me, during a period, for instance, of three months? And shall we say that, at the eighth, you will be pledged to grant me . . ."

"What?"

He deferred his answer:

"Observe that you will always be at liberty to leave me on the road if I do not succeed in interesting you. But, if you accompany me to the end, if you allow me to begin and complete the eighth enterprise with you, in three months, on the 5th of December, at the very moment when the eighth stroke of that clock sounds—and it will sound, you may be sure of that, for the old brass pendulum will not stop swinging again—you will be pledged to grant me . . ."

"What?" she repeated, a little unnerved by waiting.

He was silent. He looked at the beautiful lips which he had meant to claim as his reward. He felt perfectly certain that Hortense had understood and he thought it unnecessary to speak more plainly.

"The mere delight of seeing you will be enough to satisfy me. It is not for me but for you to impose conditions. Name them: what do you demand?"

She was grateful for his respect and said, laughingly:

"What do I demand?"

"Yes."

"Can I demand anything I like, however difficult and impossible?"

"Everything is easy and everything is possible to the man who is bent on winning you."

Then she said:

"I demand that you shall restore to me a small, antique clasp, made of a cornelian set in a silver mount. It came to me from my mother and everyone knew that

it used to bring her happiness and me too. Since the day when it vanished from my jewel-case, I have had nothing but unhappiness. Restore it to me, my good genius."

"When was the clasp stolen?"

She answered gaily:

"Seven years ago . . . or eight . . . or nine; I don't know exactly . . . I don't know where . . . I don't know how . . . I know nothing about it. . . ."

"I will find it," Rénine declared, "and you shall be happy."

MAURICE LEBLANC

AT THE SIGN OF MERCURY

To Madame Daniel,
La Roncière,
near Bassicourt.

"PARIS 30 NOVEMBER

"MY DEAREST FRIEND,—

"There has been no letter from you for a fortnight; so I don't expect now to receive one for that troublesome date of the 5th of December, which we fixed as the last day of our partnership. I rather wish it would come, because you will then be released from a contract which no longer seems to give you pleasure. To me the seven battles which we fought and won together were a time of endless delight and enthusiasm. I was living beside you. I was conscious of all the good which that more active and stirring existence was doing you. My happiness was so great that I dared not speak of it to you or let you see anything of my secret feelings except my desire to please you and my passionate devotion. To-day you have had enough of your brother in arms. Your will shall be law.

"But, though I bow to your decree, may I remind you what it was that I always believed our final adventure would be? May I repeat your words, not one of which I have forgotten?

" 'I demand,' you said, 'that you shall restore to me a small, antique clasp, made of a cornelian set in a filigree mount. It came to me from my mother; and every one knew that it used to bring her happiness and me too. Since the day when it vanished from my jewel-case, I

(From "The Eight Strokes of the Clock," by Maurice LeBlanc. Copyright, 1922, by The Macaulay Company, New York.)

have had nothing but unhappiness. Restore it to me, my good genius.'

"And, when I asked you when the clasp had disappeared, you answered, with a laugh:

" 'Seven years ago . . . or eight . . . or nine: I don't know exactly. . . . I don't know when . . . I don't know how . . . I know nothing about it. . . .'

"You were challenging me, were you not, and you set me that condition because it was one which I could not fulfil? Nevertheless, I promised and I should like to keep my promise. What I have tried to do, in order to place life before you in a more favourable light, would seem purposeless, if your confidence feels the lack of this talisman to which you attach so great a value. We must not laugh at these little superstitions. They are often the mainspring of our best actions.

"Dear friend, if you had helped me, I should have achieved yet one more victory. Alone and hard pushed by the proximity of the date, I have failed, not however without placing things on such a footing that the undertaking if you care to follow it up, has the greatest chance of success.

"And you will follow it up, won't you? We have entered into a mutual agreement which we are bound to honour. It behooves us, within a fixed time, to inscribe in the book of our common life eight good stories, to which we shall have brought energy, logic, perseverance, some subtlety and occasionally a little heroism. This is the eighth of them. It is for you to act so that it may be written in its proper place on the 5th of December, before the clock strikes eight in the evening.

"And, on that day, you will act as I shall now tell you.

"First of all—and above all, my dear, do not complain that my instructions are fanciful: each of them is an indispensable condition of success—first of all, cut in your cousin's garden three slender lengths of rush. Plait them together and bind up the two ends so as to make a rude switch, like a child's whip-lash.

"When you get to Paris, buy a long necklace of jet beads, cut into facets, and shorten it so that it consists of seventy-five beads, of almost equal size.

"Under your winter cloak, wear a blue woollen gown. On your head, a toque with red leaves on it. Round your neck, a feather boa. No gloves. No rings.

"In the afternoon, take a cab along the left bank of the river to the church of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont. At four o'clock exactly, there will be, near the holy-water basin, just inside the church, an old woman dressed in black, saying her prayers on a silver rosary. She will offer you holy water. Give her your necklace. She will count the beads and hand it back to you. After this, you will walk behind her, you will cross an arm of the Seine and she will lead you, down a lonely street in the Ile Saint-Louis, to a house which you will enter by yourself.

"On the ground-floor of this house, you will find a youngish man; with a very pasty complexion. Take off your cloak and then say to him:

" 'I have come to fetch my clasp.' "

"Do not be astonished by his agitation or dismay. Keep calm in his presence. If he questions you, if he wants to know your reason for applying to him or what impels you to make that request, give him no explanation. Your replies must be confined to these brief formulas:

" 'I have come to fetch what belongs to me. I don't know you, I don't know your name; but I am obliged to come to you like this. I must have my clasp returned to me. I must.'

"I honestly believe that, if you have the firmness not to swerve from that attitude, whatever farce the man may play, you will be completely successful. But the contest must be a short one and the issue will depend solely on your confidence in yourself and your certainty of success. It will be a sort of match in which you must defeat your opponent in the first round. If you remain impassive, you will win. If you show hesitation or uneasiness, you can do nothing against him. He will escape you and regain

the upper hand after a first moment of distress; and the game will be lost in a few minutes. There is no midway house between victory or . . . defeat.

"In the latter event, you would be obliged—I beg you to pardon me for saying so—again to accept my collaboration. I offer it to you in advance, my dear, and without any conditions, while stating quite plainly that all that I have been able to do for you and all that I may yet do gives me no other right than that of thanking you and devoting myself more than ever to the woman who represents my joy, my whole life."

. . . . . .

Hortense, after reading the letter, folded it up and put it away at the back of a drawer, saying, in a resolute voice:

"I sha'n't go."

To begin with, although she had formerly attached some slight importance to this trinket, which she had regarded as a mascot, she felt very little interest in it now that the period of her trials was apparently at an end. She could not forget that figure eight, which was the serial number of the next adventure. To launch herself upon it meant taking up the interrupted chain, going back to Rénine and giving him a pledge which, with his powers of suggestion, he would know how to turn to account.

Two days before the 5th of December, she was still in the same frame of mind. So she was on the morning of the 4th; but suddenly, without even having to contend against preliminary subterfuges, she ran out into the garden, cut three lengths of rush, plaited them as she used to do in her childhood and at twelve o'clock had herself driven to the station. She was uplifted by an eager curiosity. She was unable to resist all the amusing and novel sensations which the adventure, proposed by Rénine, promised her. It was really too tempting. The jet necklace, the toque with the autumn leaves, the old woman with the silver rosary: how could she resist their mysterious appeal and how could she refuse this oppor-

tunity of showing Rénine what she was capable of doing?

"And then, after all," she said to herself, laughing, "he's summoning me to Paris. Now eight o'clock is dangerous to me at a spot three hundred miles from Paris, in that old deserted Château de Halingre, but nowhere else. The only clock that can strike the threatening hour is down there, under lock and key, a prisoner!"

She reached Paris that evening. On the morning of the 5th she went out and bought a jet necklace, which she reduced to seventy-five beads, put on a blue gown and a toque with red leaves and, at four o'clock precisely, entered the church of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont.

Her heart was throbbing violently. This time she was alone; and how acutely she now felt the strength of that support which, from unreflecting fear rather than any reasonable motive, she had thrust aside! She looked around her, almost hoping to see him. But there was no one there . . . no one except an old lady in black, standing beside the holy-water basin.

Hortense went up to her. The old lady, who held a silver rosary in her hands, offered her holy water and then began to count the beads of the necklace which Hortense gave her.

She whispered:

"Seventy-five. That's right. Come."

Without another word, she toddled along under the light of the street-lamps, crossed the Pont des Tournelles to the Ile Saint-Louis and went down an empty street leading to a cross-roads, where she stopped in front of an old house with wrought-iron balconies:

"Go in," she said.

And the old lady went away.

. . . . . .

Hortense now saw a prosperous-looking shop which occupied almost the whole of the ground-floor and whose windows, blazing with electric light, displayed a huddled array of old furniture and antiquities. She stood there for a few seconds, gazing at it absently. A sign-board

bore the words "The Mercury," together with the name of the owner of the shop, "Pancaldi." Higher up, on a projecting cornice which ran on a level with the first floor, a small niche sheltered a terra-cotta Mercury poised on one foot, with wings to his sandals and the caduceus in his hand, who, as Hortense noted, was leaning a little too far forward in the ardour of his flight and ought logically to have lost his balance and taken a header into the street.

"Now!" she said, under her breath.

She turned the handle of the door and walked in.

Despite the ringing of the bells actuated by the opening door, no one came to meet her. The shop seemed to be empty. However, at the extreme end there was a room at the back of the shop and after that another, both crammed with furniture and knick-knacks, many of which looked very valuable. Hortense followed a narrow gangway which twisted and turned between two walls built up of cupboards, cabinets and console-tables, went up two steps and found herself in the last room of all.

A man was sitting at a writing-desk and looking through some account-books. Without turning his head, he said:

"I am at your service, madam. . . . Please look round you. . . ."

This room contained nothing but articles of a special character which gave it the appearance of some alchemist's laboratory in the middle ages: stuffed owls, skeletons, skulls, copper alembics, astrolabes and all around, hanging on the walls, amulets of every description, mainly hands of ivory or coral with two fingers pointing to ward off ill-luck.

"Are you wanting anything in particular, madam?" asked M. Pancaldi, closing his desk and rising from his chair.

"It's the man," thought Hortense.

He had in fact an uncommonly pasty complexion. A little forked beard, flecked with grey, lengthened his face, which was surmounted by a bald, pallid forehead,

beneath which gleamed a pair of small, prominent, restless, shifty eyes.

Hortense, who had not removed her veil or cloak, replied:

"I want a clasp."

"They're in this show-case," he said, leading the way to the connecting room.

Hortense glanced over the glass case and said:

"No, no, . . . I don't see what I'm looking for. I don't want just any clasp, but a clasp which I lost out of a jewel-case some years ago and which I have come to look for here."

She was astounded to see the commotion displayed on his features. His eyes became haggard.

"Here? . . . I don't think you are in the least likely . . . What sort of clasp is it? . . ."

"A cornelian, mounted in gold filigree . . . of the 1830 period."

"I don't understand," he stammered. "Why do you come to me?"

She now removed her veil and laid aside her cloak.

He stepped back, as though terrified by the sight of her, and whispered:

"The blue gown! . . . The toque! . . . And—can I believe my eyes?—the jet necklace! . . ."

It was perhaps the whip-lash formed of three rushes that excited him most violently. He pointed his finger at it, began to stagger where he stood and ended by beating the air with his arms, like a drowning man, and fainting away in a chair.

Hortense did not move.

"Whatever farce he may play," Rénine had written, "have the courage to remain impassive."

Perhaps he was not playing a farce. Nevertheless she forced herself to be calm and indifferent.

This lasted for a minute or two, after which M. Pancaldi recovered from his swoon, wiped away the perspiration streaming down his forehead and, striving to control himself, resumed, in a trembling voice:

"Why do you apply to me?"

"Because the clasp is in your possession."

"Who told you that?" he said, without denying the accusation. "How do you know?"

"I know because it is so. Nobody has told me anything. I came here positive that I should find my clasp and with the immovable determination to take it away with me."

"But do you know me? Do you know my name?"

. "I don't know you. I did not know your name before I read it over your shop. To me you are simply the man who is going to give me back what belongs to me."

He was greatly agitated. He kept on walking to and fro in a small empty space surrounded by a circle of piled-up furniture, at which he hit out idiotically, at the risk of bringing it down.

Hortense felt that she had the whip hand of him; and, profiting by his confusion, she said, suddenly, in a commanding and threatening tone:

"Where is the thing? You must give it back to me. I insist upon it."

Pancaldi gave way to a moment of despair. He folded his hands and mumbled a few words of entreaty. Then, defeated and suddenly resigned, he said, more distinctly:

"You insist? . . ."

"I do. You must give it to me."

"Yes, yes, I must . . . I agree."

"Speak!" she ordered, more harshly still.

"Speak, no, but write: I will write my secret. . . . And that will be the end of me."

He turned to his desk and feverishly wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper, which he put into an envelope and sealed it:

"See," he said, "here's my secret. . . . It was my whole life. . . ."

And, so saying, he suddenly pressed against his temple a revolver which he had produced from under a pile of papers and fired.

With a quick movement, Hortense struck up his arm.

The bullet struck the mirror of a cheval-glass. But Pancaldi collapsed and began to groan, as though he were wounded.

Hortense made a great effort not to lose her composure:

"Rénine warned me," she reflected. "The man's a play-actor. He has kept the envelope. He has kept his revolver. I won't be taken in by him."

Nevertheless, she realized that, despite his apparent calmness, the attempt at suicide and the revolver-shot had completely unnerved her. All her energies were dispersed, like the sticks of a bundle whose string has been cut; and she had a painful impression that the man, who was grovelling at her feet, was in reality slowly getting the better of her.

She sat down, exhausted. As Rénine had foretold, the duel had not lasted longer than a few minutes but it was she who had succumbed, thanks to her feminine nerves and at the very moment when she felt entitled to believe that she had won.

The man Pancaldi was fully aware of this; and, without troubling to invent a transition, he ceased his jeremiads, leapt to his feet, cut a sort of agile caper before Hortense's eyes and cried, in a jeering tone:

"Now we are going to have a little chat; but it would be a nuisance to be at the mercy of the first passing customer, wouldn't it?"

He ran to the street-door, opened it and pulled down the iron shutter which closed the shop. Then, still hopping and skipping, he came back to Hortense:

"Oof! I really thought I was done for! One more effort, madam, and you would have pulled it off. But then I'm such a simple chap! It seemed to me that you had come from the back of beyond, as an emissary of Providence, to call me to account; and, like a fool, I was about to give the thing back. . . . Ah, Mlle. Hortense —let me call you so: I used to know you by that name —Mlle. Hortense, the time has come to speak out. Who contrived this business? Not you; eh? It's not in your

style. Then who? . . . I have always been honest in my life, scrupulously honest . . . except once . . . in the matter of that clasp. And, whereas I thought the story was buried and forgotten, here it is suddenly raked up again. Why? That's what I want to know."

Hortense was no longer even attempting to fight. He was bringing to bear upon her all his virile strength, all his spite, all his fears, all the threats expressed in his furious gestures and on his features, which were both ridiculous and evil:

"Speak, I want to know. If I have a secret foe, let me defend myself against him! Who is he? Who sent you here? Who urged you to take action? Is it a rival incensed by my good luck, who wants in his turn to benefit by the clasp? Speak, can't you, damn it all . . . or, I swear by Heaven, I'll make you! . . ."

She had an idea that he was reaching out for his revolver and stepped back, holding her arms before her, in the hope of escaping.

They thus struggled against each other; and Hortense, who was becoming more and more frightened, not so much of the attack as of her assailant's distorted face, was beginning to scream, when Pancaldi suddenly stood motionless, with his arms before him, his fingers outstretched and his eyes staring above Hortense's head:

"Who's there? How did you get in?" he asked, in a stifled voice.

Hortense did not even need to turn round to feel assured that Rénine was coming to her assistance and that it was his inexplicable appearance that was causing the dealer such dismay. As a matter of fact, a slender figure stole through a heap of easy chairs and sofas: and Rénine came forward with a tranquil step.

"Who are you?" repeated Pancaldi. "Where do you come from?"

"From up there," he said, very amiably, pointing to the ceiling.

"From up there?"

"Yes, from the first floor. I have been the tenant

of the floor above this for the past three months. I heard a noise just now. Some one was calling out for help. So I came down."

"But how did you get in here?"

"By the staircase."

"What staircase?"

"The iron staircase at the end of the shop. The man who owned it before you had a flat on my floor and used to go up and down by that hidden staircase. You had the door shut off. I opened it."

"But by what right, sir? It amounts to breaking in."

"Breaking in is allowed, when there's a fellow-creature to be rescued."

"Once more, who are you?"

"Prince Rénine . . . and a friend of this lady's," said Rénine, bending over Hortense and kissing her hand.

Pancaldi seemed to be choking, and mumbled:

"Oh, I understand! . . . You instigated the plot . . . it was you who sent the lady. . . ."

"It was, M. Pancaldi, it was!"

"And what are your intentions?"

"My intentions are irreproachable. No violence. Simply a little interview. When that is over, you will hand over what I in my turn have come to fetch."

"What?"

"The clasp."

"That, never!" shouted the dealer.

"Don't say no. It's a foregone conclusion."

"No power on earth, sir, can compel me to do such a thing!"

"Shall we send for your wife? Madame Pancaldi will perhaps realize the position better than you do."

The idea of no longer being alone with this unexpected adversary seemed to appeal to Pancaldi. There was a bell on the table beside him. He struck it three times.

"Capital!" exclaimed Rénine. "You see, my dear, M. Pancaldi is becoming quite amiable. Not a trace left of the devil broken loose who was going for you just now.

No, M. Pancaldi only has to find himself dealing with a man to recover his qualities of courtesy and kindness. A perfect sheep! Which does not mean that things will go quite of themselves. Far from it! There's no more obstinate animal than a sheep. . . ."

Right at the end of the shop, between the dealer's writing-desk and the winding staircase, a curtain was raised, admitting a woman who was holding a door open. She might have been thirty years of age. Very simply dressed, she looked, with the apron on her, more like a cook than like the mistress of a household. But she had an attractive face and a pleasing figure.

Hortense, who had followed Rénine, was surprised to recognize her as a maid whom she had had in her service when a girl:

"What! Is that you, Lucienne? Are you Madame Pancaldi?"

The newcomer looked at her, recognized her also and seemed embarrassed. Rénine said to her:

"Your husband and I need your assistance, Madame Pancaldi, to settle a rather complicated matter . . . a matter in which you played an important part. . . ."

She came forward without a word, obviously ill at ease, asking her husband, who did not take his eyes off her:

"What is it? . . . What do they want with me? . . . What is he referring to?"

"It's about the clasp!" Pancaldi whispered, under his breath.

These few words were enough to make Madame Pancaldi realize to the full the seriousness of her position. And she did not try to keep her countenance or to retort with futile protests. She sank into a chair, sighing:

"Oh, that's it! . . . I understand. . . . Mlle. Hortense has found the track. . . . Oh, it's all up with us!"

There was a moment's respite. The struggle between the adversaries had hardly begun, before the husband and

wife adopted the attitude of defeated persons whose only hope lay in the victor's clemency. Staring motionless before her, Madame Pancaldi began to cry. Rénine bent over her and said:

"Do you mind if we go over the case from the beginning? We shall then see things more clearly; and I am sure that our interview will lead to a perfectly natural solution. . . . This is how things happened: nine years ago, when you were lady's maid to Mlle. Hortense in the country, you made the acquaintance of M. Pancaldi, who soon became your lover. You were both of you Corsicans, in other words, you came from a country where superstitions are very strong and where questions of good and bad luck, the evil eye, and spells and charms exert a profound influence over the lives of one and all. Now it was said that your young mistress' clasp had always brought luck to its owners. That was why, in a weak moment prompted by M. Pancaldi, you stole the clasp. Six month afterwards, you became Madame Pancaldi. . . . That is your whole story, is it not, told in a few sentences? The whole story of two people who would have remained honest members of society, if they had been able to resist that casual temptation? . . . I need not tell you how you both succeeded in life and how, possessing the talisman, believing its powers and trusting in yourselves, you rose to the first rank of antiquarians. To-day, well-off, owning this shop, 'The Mercury,' you attribute the success of your undertakings to that clasp. To lose it would to your eyes spell bankruptcy and poverty. Your whole life has been centred upon it. It is your fetish. It is the little household god who watches over you and guides your steps. It is there, somewhere, hidden in this jungle; and no one of course would ever have suspected anything—for I repeat, you are decent people, but for this one lapse—if an accident had not led me to look into your affairs."

Rénine paused and continued:

"That was two months ago, two months of minute investigations, which presented no difficulty to me, be-

cause, having discovered your trail, I hired the flat overhead and was able to use that staircase . . . but, all the same, two months wasted to a certain extent because I have not yet succeeded. And Heaven knows how I have ransacked this shop of yours! There is not a piece of furniture that I have left unsearched, not a plank in the floor that I have not inspected. All to no purpose. Yes, there was one thing, an incidental discovery. In a secret recess in your writing-table, Pancaldi, I turned up a little account-book in which you have set down your remorse, your uneasiness, your fear of punishment and your dread of God's wrath. . . . It was highly imprudent of you, Pancaldi! People don't write such confessions! And, above all, they don't leave them lying about! Be this as it may, I read them and I noted one passage, which struck me as particularly important and was of use to me in preparing my plan of campaign: 'Should she come to me, the woman whom I robbed, should she come to me as I saw her in her garden, while Lucienne was taking the clasp; should she appear to me wearing the blue gown and the toque of red leaves, with the jet necklace and the whip of three plaited rushes which she was carrying that day; should she appear to me thus and say: "I have come to claim my property," then I shall understand that her conduct is inspired from on high and that I must obey the decree of Providence.' That is what is written in your book, Pancaldi, and it explains the conduct of the lady whom you call Mlle. Hortense. Acting on my instructions and in accordance with the setting thought out by yourself, she came to you, from the back of beyond, to use your own expression. A little more self-possession on her part; and you know that she would have won the day. Unfortunately, you are a wonderful actor; your sham suicide put her out; and you understood that this was not a decree of Providence, but simply an offensive on the part of your former victim. I had no choice, therefore, but to intervene. Here I am. . . . And now let's finish the business. Pancaldi, that clasp!"

"No," said the dealer, who seemed to recover all his energy at the very thought of restoring the clasp.

"And you, Madame Pancaldi."

"I don't know where it is," the wife declared.

"Very well. Then let us come to deeds. Madame Pancaldi you have a son of seven whom you love with all your heart. This is Thursday and, as on every Thursday, your little boy is to come home alone from his aunt's. Two of my friends are posted on the road by which he returns and, in the absence of instructions to the contrary, will kidnap him as he passes."

Madame Pancaldi lost her head at once:

"My son! Oh, please, please . . . not that! . . . I swear that I know nothing. My husband would never consent to confide in me."

Rénine continued:

"Next point. This evening, I shall lodge an information with the public prosecutor. Evidence: the confessions in the account-book. Consequences: action by the police, search of the premises and the rest."

Pancaldi was silent. The others had a feeling that all these threats did not affect him and that, protected by his fetish, he believed himself to be invulnerable. But his wife fell on her knees at Rénine's feet and stammered:

"No, no . . . I entreat you! . . . It would mean going to prison and I don't want to go! . . . And then my son! . . . Oh, I entreat you! . . ."

Hortense, seized with compassion, took Rénine to one side:

"Poor woman! Let me intercede for her."

"Set your mind at rest," he said. "Nothing is going to happen to her son."

"But your two friends?"

"Sheer bluff."

"Your application to the public prosecutor?"

"A mere threat."

"Then what are you trying to do?"

"To frighten them out of their wits, in the hope of making them drop a remark, a word, which will tell us

what we want to know. We've tried every other means. This is the last; and it is a method which, I find, nearly always succeeds. Remember our adventures."

"But if the word which you expect to hear is not spoken?"

"It must be spoken," said Rénine, in a low voice. "We must finish the matter. The hour is at hand."

His eyes met hers; and she blushed crimson at the thought that the hour to which he was alluding was the eighth and that he had no other object than to finish the matter before that eighth hour struck.

"So you see, on the one hand, what you are risking," he said to the Pancaldi pair. "The disappearance of your child . . . and prison: prison for certain, since there is the book with its confessions. And now, on the other hand, here's my offer: twenty thousand francs if you hand over the clasp immediately, this minute. Remember, it isn't worth three louis."

No reply. Madame Pancaldi was crying.

Rénine resumed, pausing between each proposal:

"I'll double my offer. . . . I'll treble it. . . . Hang it all, Pancaldi, you're unreasonable! . . . I suppose you want me to make it a round sum? All right: a hundred thousand francs."

He held out his hand as if there was no doubt that they would give him the clasp.

Madame Pancaldi was the first to yield and did so with a sudden outburst of rage against her husband.

"Well, confess, can't you? . . . Speak up! . . . Where have you hidden it? . . . Look here, you aren't going to be obstinate, what? If you are, it means ruin . . . and poverty . . . And then there's our boy! . . . Speak out, do!"

Hortense whispered:

"Rénine, this is madness; the clasp has no value. . . ."

"Never fear," said Rénine, "he's not going to accept. . . . But look at him. . . . How excited he is! Exactly what I wanted. . . . Ah, this, you know, is really exciting! . . . To make people lose their heads! To rob them

of all control over what they are thinking and saying! . . . And, in the midst of this confusion, in the storm that tosses them to and fro, to catch sight of the tiny spark which will flash forth somewhere or other! . . . Look at him! Look at the fellow! A hundred thousand francs for a valueless pebble . . . if not, prison: it's enough to turn any man's head!"

Pancaldi, in fact, was grey in the face; his lips were trembling and a drop of saliva was trickling from their corners. It was easy to guess the seething turmoil of his whole being, shaken by conflicting emotions, by the clash between greed and fear. Suddenly he burst out; and it was obvious that his words were pouring forth at random, without his knowing in the least what he was saying:

"A hundred thousand francs! Two hundred thousand! Five hundred thousand! A million! A two fig for your millions! What's the use of millions? One loses them. They disappear . . . They go. . . . There's only one thing that counts: luck. It's on your side or else against you. And luck has been on my side these last nine years. It has never betrayed me; and you expect me to betray it? Why? Out of fear? Prison? My son? Bosh! . . . No harm will come to me so long as I compel luck to work on my behalf. It's my servant, it's my friend. It clings to the clasp. How? How can I tell? It's the cornelian, no doubt. . . . There are magic stones, which hold happiness, as others hold fire, or sulphur, or gold. . . ."

Rénine kept his eyes fixed upon him, watching for the least word, the least modulation of the voice. The curiosity-dealer was now laughing, with a nervous laugh, while resuming the self-control of a man who feels sure of himself: and he walked up to Rénine with jerky movements that revealed an increasing resolution:

"Millions? My dear sir, I wouldn't have them as a gift. The little bit of stone which I possess is worth much more than that. And the proof of it lies in all the pains which you are at to take it from me. Aha! Months devoted to looking for it, as you yourself confess! Months

in which you turned everything topsy-turvy, while I, who suspected nothing, did not even defend myself! Why should I? The little thing defended itself all alone. . . . It does not want to be discovered and it sha'n't be. . . . It likes being here. . . . It presides over a good, honest business that satisfies it. . . . Pancaldi's luck! Why, it's known to all the neighbourhood, among all the dealers! I proclaim it from the house-tops: 'I'm a lucky man!' I even made so bold as to take the god of luck, Mercury, as my patron! He too protects me. See, I've got Mercuries all over my shop! Look up there, on that shelf, a whole row of statuettes, like the one over the front-door, proofs signed by a great sculptor who went smash and sold them to me. . . . Would you like one, my dear sir? It will bring you luck too. Take your pick! A present from Pancaldi, to make up to you for your defeat! Does that suit you?"

He put a stool against the wall, under the shelf, took down a statuette and plumped it into Rénine's arms. And, laughing heartily, growing more and more excited as his enemy seemed to yield ground and to fall back before his spirited attack, he explained:

"Well done! He accepts! And the fact that he accepts shows that we are all agreed! Madame Pancaldi, don't distress yourself. Your son's coming back and nobody's going to prison! Good-bye, Mlle. Hortense! Good-day, sir! Hope to see you again! If you want to speak to me at any time, just give three thumps on the ceiling. Good-bye . . . don't forget your present . . . and may Mercury be kind to you! Good-bye, my dear Prince! Good-bye, Mlle. Hortense! . . ."

He hustled them to the iron staircase, gripped each of them by the arm in turn and pushed them up to the little door hidden at the top of the stairs.

And the strange thing was that Rénine made no protest. He did not attempt to resist. He allowed himself to be led along like a naughty child that is taken up to bed.

Less than five minutes had elapsed between the moment

when he made his offer to Pancaldi and the moment when Pancaldi turned him out of the shop with a statuette in his arms.

. . . . . .

The dining-room and drawing-room of the flat which Rénine had taken on the first floor looked out upon the street. The table in the dining-room was laid for two.

"Forgive me, won't you?" said Rénine, as he opened the door of the drawing-room for Hortense. "I thought that, whatever happened, I should most likely see you this evening and that we might as well dine together. Don't refuse me this kindness, which will be the last favour granted in our last adventure."

Hortense did not refuse him. The manner in which the battle had ended was so different from everything that she had seen hitherto that she felt disconcerted. At any rate, why should she refuse, seeing that the terms of the contract had not been fulfilled?

Rénine left the room to give an order to his manservant. Two minutes later, he came back for Hortense. It was then a little past seven.

There were flowers on the table; and the statue of Mercury, Pancaldi's present, stood overtopping them.

"May the god of luck preside over our repast," said Rénine.

He was full of animation and expressed his great delight at having her sitting opposite him:

"Yes," he exclaimed, "I had to resort to powerful means and attract you by the bait of the most fabulous enterprises. You must confess that my letter was jolly smart! The three rushes, the blue gown; simply irresistible! And, when I had thrown in a few puzzles of my own invention, such as the seventy-five beads of the necklace and the old woman with the silver rosary, I knew that you were bound to succumb to the temptation. Don't be angry with me. I wanted to see you and I wanted it to be to-day. You have come and I thank you."

He next told her how he had got on the track of the stolen trinket:

"You hoped, didn't you, in laying down that condition, that I shouldn't be able to fulfil it? You made a mistake, my dear. The test, at least at the beginning, was easy enough, because it was based upon an undoubted fact: the talismanic character attributed to the clasp. I had only to hunt about and see whether among the people around you, among your servants, there was ever any one upon whom that character may have exercised some attraction. Now, on the list of persons which I succeeded in drawing up I at once noticed the name of Mlle. Lucienne, as coming from Corsica. This was my starting-point. The rest was a mere concatenation of events."

Hortense stared at him in amazement. How was it that he was accepting his defeat with such a careless air and even talking in a tone of triumph, whereas really he had been soundly beaten by Pancaldi and even made to look just a trifle ridiculous?

She could not help letting him feel this; and the fashion in which she did so betrayed a certain disappointment, a certain humiliation:

"Everything is a concatenation of events: very well. But the chain is broken, because, when all is said, though you know the thief, you did not succeed in laying hands upon the stolen clasp."

The reproach was obvious. Rénine had not accustomed her to failure. And furthermore she was irritated to see how heedlessly he was accepting a blow which, after all, entailed the ruin of any hopes that he might have entertained.

He did not reply. He had filled their two glasses with champagne and was slowly emptying his own, with his eyes fixed on the statuette of Mercury. He turned it about on its pedestal and examined it with the eye of a delighted connoisseur:

"What a beautiful thing is a harmonious line! Colour does not uplift me so much as outline, proportion, symmetry and all the wonderful properties of form. Look at

this little statue. Pancaldi's right: it's the work of a great artist. The legs are both slender and muscular; the whole figure gives an impression of buoyancy and speed. It is very well done. There's only one fault, a very slight one: perhaps you've not noticed it?"

"Yes, I have," said Hortense. "It struck me the moment I saw the sign, outside. You mean, don't you, a certain lack of balance? The god is leaning over too far on the leg that carries him. He looks as though he were going to pitch forward."

"That's very clever of you," said Rénine. "The fault is almost imperceptible and it needs a trained eye to see it. Really, however, as a matter of logic, the weight of the body ought to have its way and, in accordance with natural laws, the little god ought to take a header."

After a pause he continued:

"I noticed that flaw on the first day. How was it that I did not draw an inference at once? I was shocked because the artist had sinned against an æsthetic law, whereas I ought to have been shocked because he had overlooked a physical law. As though art and nature were not blended together! And as though the laws of gravity could be disturbed without some fundamental reason!"

"What do you mean?" asked Hortense, puzzled by these reflections, which seemed so far removed from their secret thoughts. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing!" he said. "I am only surprised that I didn't understand sooner why Mercury did not plump forward, as he should have done."

"And what is the reason?"

"The reason? I imagine that Pancaldi, when pulling the statuette about to make it serve his purpose, must have disturbed its balance, but that this balance was restored by something which holds the little god back and which makes up for his really too dangerous posture."

"Something, you say?"

"Yes, a counterweight."

Hortense gave a start. She too was beginning to see a little light. She murmured:

"A counterweight? . . . Are you thinking that it might be . . . in the pedestal?"

"Why not?"

"Is that possible? But, if so, how did Pancaldi come to give you this statuette?"

"He never gave me *this* one," Rénine declared. "I took this one myself."

"But where? And when?"

"Just now, while you were in the drawing-room. I got out of that window, which is just over the signboard and beside the niche containing the little god. And I exchanged the two, that is to say, I took the statue which was outside and put the one which Pancaldi gave me in its place."

"But doesn't that one lean forward?"

"No, no more than the others do, on the shelf in his shop. But Pancaldi is not an artist. A lack of equilibrium does not impress him; he will see nothing wrong; and he will continue to think himself favoured by luck, which is another way of saying that luck will continue to favour him. Meanwhile, here's the statuette, the one used for the sign. Am I to break the pedestal and take your clasp out of the leaden sheath, soldered to the back of the pedestal, which keeps Mercury steady?"

"No, no, there's no need for that," Hortense hurriedly murmured.

Rénine's intuition, his subtlety, the skill with which he had managed the whole business: to her, for the moment, all these things remained in the background. But she suddenly remembered that the eighth adventure was completed, that Rénine had surmounted every obstacle, that the test had turned to his advantage and that the extreme limit of time fixed for the last of the adventures was not yet reached.

He had the cruelty to call attention to the fact:

"A quarter to eight," he said.

An oppressive silence fell between them. Both felt its

discomfort to such a degree that they hesitated to make the least movement. In order to break it, Rénine jested:

"That worthy M. Pancaldi, how good it was of him to tell me what I wished to know! I knew, however, that by exasperating him, I should end by picking up the missing clue in what he said. It was just as though one were to hand some one a flint and steel and suggest to him that he was to use it. In the end, the spark is obtained. In my case, what produced the spark was the unconscious but inevitable comparison which he drew between the cornelian clasp, the element of luck, and Mercury, the god of luck. That was enough. I understood that this association of ideas arose from his having actually associated the two factors of luck by embodying one in the other, or, to speak more plainly, by hiding the trinket in the statuette. And I at once remembered the Mercury outside the door and its defective poise . . ."

Rénine suddenly interrupted himself. It seemed to him that all his remarks were falling on deaf ears. Hortense had put her hand to her forehead and, thus veiling her eyes, sat motionless and remote.

She was indeed not listening. The end of this particular adventure and the manner in which Rénine had acted on this occasion no longer interested her. What she was thinking of was the complex series of adventures amid which she had been living for the past three months and the wonderful behaviour of the man who had offered her his devotion. She saw, as in a magic picture, the fabulous deeds performed by him, all the good that he had done, the lives saved, the sorrows assuaged, the order restored wherever his masterly will had been brought to bear. Nothing was impossible to him. What he undertook to do he did. Every aim that he set before him was attained in advance. And all this without excessive effort, with the calmness of one who knows his own strength and knows that nothing can resist it.

Then what could she do against him? Why should she defend herself and how? If he demanded that she should yield, would he not know how to make her do so and

would this last adventure be any more difficult for him than the others? Supposing that she ran away: did the wide world contain a retreat in which she would be safe from his pursuit? From the first moment of their first meeting, the end was certain, since Rénine had decreed that it should be so.

However, she still cast about for weapons, for protection of some sort; and she said to herself that, though he had fulfilled the eight conditions and restored the cornelian clasp to her before the eighth hour had struck, she was nevertheless protected by the fact that this eighth hour was to strike on the clock of the Château de Halingre and not elsewhere. It was a formal compact. Rénine had said that day, gazing on the lips which he longed to kiss:

"The old brass pendulum will start swinging again; and, when, on the fixed date, the clock once more strikes eight, then . . ."

She looked up. He was not moving either, but sat solemnly, patiently waiting.

She was on the point of saying, she was even preparing her words:

"You know, our agreement says it must be the Halingre clock. All the other conditions have been fulfilled . . . but not this one. So I am free, am I not? I am entitled not to keep my promise, which, moreover, I never made, but which in any case falls to the ground? . . . And I am perfectly free . . . released from any scruple of conscience? . . ."

She had not time to speak. At that precise moment, there was a click behind her, like that of a clock about to strike.

A first stroke sounded, then a second, then a third.

Hortense moaned. She had recognized the very sound of the old clock, the Halingre clock, which three months ago, by breaking in a supernatural manner the silence of the deserted château, had set both of them on the road of the eight adventures.

She counted the strokes. The clock struck eight.

"Ah!" she murmured, half swooning and hiding her face in her hands. "The clock . . . the clock is here . . . the one from over there . . . I recognize its voice. . . ."

She said no more. She felt that Rénine had his eyes fixed upon her and this sapped all her energies. Besides, had she been able to recover them, she would have been no better off nor sought to offer him the least resistance, for the reason that she did not wish to resist. All the adventures were over, but one remained to be undertaken, the anticipation of which wiped out the memory of all the rest. It was the adventure of love, the most delightful, the most bewildering, the most adorable of all adventures. She accepted fate's decree, rejoicing in all that might come, because she was in love. She smiled in spite of herself, as she reflected that happiness was again to enter her life at the very moment when her well-beloved was bringing her the cornelian clasp.

The clock struck the hour for the second time.

Hortense raised her eyes to Rénine. She struggled a few seconds longer. But she was like a charmed bird, incapable of any movement of revolt; and at the eighth stroke she fell upon his breast and offered him her lips. . . .

HENRY C. ROWLAND

THREE LIARS

In the eyes of the law it may be considered preferable that nine guilty persons should escape punishment rather than that one innocent should suffer it.

It is doubtful if the same holds true in the hearts of the public. That relentless monster demands that somebody pay, the guilty one if possible, but somebody. So the last brilliant success of that charlatan or phenomenon, Jacques Hughes—for I could not determine which—brought him tremendous acclaim.

Partly on the strength of our having been little boys in school together, when I had sometimes championed him, and partly because it seemed the square thing to do, I told Jacques frankly that I had still far more respect for the acuteness of his own mind than for his professed ability to read that of a man accused of crime as if it were an open book. He was not in the least offended, but invited me to stay on in Paris to see another case.

This was not long in presenting itself. Jacques sent me a *pneumatique* to say that M. Pervier was coming to his studio to describe the bald facts leading up to the Do Castello disappearance, and would I care to hear what he had to say.

I arrived at the studio with a mind as blank of any definite opinion as Jacques claimed his own to be. Before examining a suspect, Jacques required to be told in detail only what was known actually to have happened, with as precise a description as could be furnished by an expert observer of the place and people involved. He declined to listen to any theory or deduction about the case, on the

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ground that he didn't want to risk the suggesting of any preconceived idea of his own to the mind of the person that he undertook to read. This mental scrutiny of his, he professed, was precisely the opposite of the usual process of verbal cross-examination. He desired only actual facts for the posing of his purely mental questions. All of which sounded like utter bunk to me.

On this day in early spring I found Jacques painting in his curiously immaculate way, as if the slightest smirch of pigment would burn a hole in any part of him it touched. This singular cleanliness that had been characteristic of him as a little boy in that Maine district school near Wiscassett was .significant in suggesting that his mental processes might function similarly, with no running of the colors, or "lacing" of the picture.

"Hello, Johnny," said he, "on the dot. Pervier is coming up now in the lift."

"More clairvoyance, Jacques?"

"No more than when you came with your store leg. For one thing, I've found him to be always on the stroke, and for another he's the only one besides my neighbor underneath at whom the concierge's dog barks, and she's gone out with her Pomeranian."

M. Pervier came in. I don't know why the concierge's dog saw fit to bark at him, unless because the agent's personality was such a self-obliterative one that the dog was never quite sure whether he was a real person or a gray little ghost.

He now bowed, seated himself wax figure fashion, and in his phonographic voice set the facts of the case before us. It started like a fairy tale.

Twenty years ago a certain innkeeper of a small hamlet in Brittany had two beautiful daughters. This man's name was Keradec and the girls' Anne (the patron saint of Brittany) and Corentine. Keradec's inn was patronized all the year round by artists, French and foreign. Situated at the head of a small *anse* or estuary of the sea, it offered great opportunity for marine painters, among whom was a young man of talent and serious purpose named Louis de

Domcourt, of the old Normandy nobility and an only child.

Louis fell in love with Anne, or Anna as she was called, and committed what was in the France of that day a grave filial offense, and one against his caste. He married her despite the wishes of his parents, who gave their consent only after he had been dragged from the sea unconscious after an attempt at suicide.

Anna was *fille honnête;* in old fashioned American, a virtuous girl. But her elder sister Corentine was not. She had been ruined by her association with gay young artists, if such a *bébé incassable,* unbreakable doll of a Breton girl can be ruined in this sense. Corentine must, however, have been depraved because she had been known to pose with her abundant hair uncoiffed, at that time as shameless as if a Mohammedan woman were to pose with face unveiled.

At about the time when the stricken parents of Louis gave their legal consent to his marriage with Anna, Corentine was carried off to the Argentine by a wild young pampas bull of a painter who was the only son of an Argentine cattle king named Do Castello, a Portuguese prefix of nobility in a country originally Spanish. To the surprise of everybody concerned, including, no doubt, his own, he subsequently married her. So that after getting away to a bad start this beautiful daughter of a Breton peasant innkeeper did none so badly for herself.

In a worldly sense Corentine, the elder by two years, did better than Anna. Her husband, Don Miguel do Castello, inherited one of those enormous pampas fortunes that cause South Americans to glitter in the European firmament of dimmer stars, while the Count de Domcourt inherited scarcely more than a semi-ruined old chateau with an overgrown park and a few acres of gorse and bracken covered moor along the top of the wind-swept cliffs and that nourished only rock rabbits.

The count's one treasure was his lovely daughter Annik, the Breton diminutive of Anna, and whose life had cost that of her mother. She was the only child, now eighteen,

and as Pervier tersely described *belle comme une églantine,* beautiful as a wild rose.

But Annik if an eglantine had, like that wild flower, her thorns. She was a temperamental girl and given at times to fits of fury, short cyclonic outbursts that would leave her tearful if not repentant. She returned in full measure the love that was about all the impoverished count had to lavish on her.

As a painter of marines he was actually more of a dilettante, and although his work was usually exposed in the spring salon, it is doubtful if he ever sold a picture except perhaps to some sympathetic friend. He was fond of natural sciences and a student of metaphysics.

His one robust recreation was a love of the sea, not only as an object of artistic contemplation but an element he liked to study in its different moods and faces in close contact aboard his little yacht, this a yawl rigged fishing boat that was his one small indulgence. He was a good sailor, expert navigator, like a sea gull in his sense of orientation and weather wisdom and knowledge of tricky winds and trickier tides.

Annik had, of course, a number of admirers, two or three of whom were actual suitors. Of these it is necessary to consider only a young man named Raoul de Malartic, to whom she was practically engaged, also of old noble family, though not employing the title. The impediment to the marriage was poverty, though Raoul was not doing badly at this time as an *agent de location* in a real estate concern.

Annik, so far as concerned her deeper sentiment for Raoul, had up to this time left them all in doubt, herself perhaps as much as anybody else. She played fast and loose with Raoul, affectionate one day, cutting and sarcastic the next, depending on her mood. She had often told him she was heartily sick of poverty. That she wanted beautiful gowns and jewels, and a big glittering car and a gleaming yacht, like the rich foreign visitors to that part of the coast. Raoul appealed to the count, but he might as well have appealed to the *calvaire* at the

crossroads. Better, perhaps, because the poor count could not decide anything for himself, let alone for his high powered, temperamental daughter.

Then out of the Argentine came Tante Corentine, Donna Miguel do Castello, with money. With loads and loads of money. More than that, Corentine did not come alone. She was now a widow, and she brought with her the sole heir to these vast revenues, her only son Miguel.

The croft from which Corentine had flitted was now, of course, too small to house her. She needed space now to ruffle her plumage of a bird of paradise. Wherefore she had written to her brother-in-law, the count, requesting that he purchase the local chateau of her commune, without reference as to whether it was for sale or not, or what he might have to pay for it. She gave him *carte blanche,* and the count turned over the affair to Raoul, who made a commission big enough to set him up in business for himself had he so desired.

Now, the Count de Domcourt's life had been like ancient Gaul, divided into three parts, three *grandes passions* —that for his wife, that for his daughter, and a passion of hatred for his sister-in-law. Corentine, knowing of Anna's attachment for him, and his own honorable intention in her regard, had been the one to write to his parents anonymously but crudely, falsely giving her sister a bad name and warning the family that they had better set forces in motion to break up the affair.

Now on her return the count, in a sort of pale flare of reminiscent hatred, refused to have any traffic with her at all. Raoul might do her business if he liked. Raoul was not yet a member of the family. It was all right enough for Corentine to buy the chateau if she chose.

Corentine took his rebuff indifferently enough. She made no effort to see the count nor her niece, Annik. But at the end of about a year, imbued whether by restlessness or malice, she inserted the thin edge of the wedge by telling Miguel that she had heard indirectly of his Cousin Annik's charms and that her informant had stated she was the loveliest girl in France.

That was enough for the long horned bull calf. He had butted around Paris and Biarritz and the Riviera without precisely becoming satiated, but with a considerable exhaustion of the finest material for conquest.

Miguel rejoiced at the opportunity of a romantic quest, and took a whirl up through Normandy in his car with every symbol of magnificence attached to him.

He was a handsome fellow, a little above medium height, broad shouldered, agile, and lean, of dark complexion, but with a fine clear olive skin. There was a streak of cruelty in him, less of a perverse than of a feral kind, like that of a jaguar or other feline creature. It is not surprising that up to this time he had come and seen and conquered.

Scorning all pretenses of subterfuge, Miguel drove into the unkempt park of the old chateau, and fetched up at the *perron* before the massive doors of a house that was not the usual Normandy sort with great diagonal beams let into mason work, but of Caen stone, big blocks in pleasing proportion, roofed in heavy tiles.

Miguel was prepared for an initial rebuff, but he was quick of speech, facile, and plausible, and could be charming when he chose.

The count, taken by surprise, received him in accordance with the law that is older than convention or prejudice and common to all peoples, both civilized and savage, the law of hospitality. Annik was even more cordial, permitted him as a first cousin to kiss her cheek.

From that first visit their intimacy rapidly progressed. It is probable that the count neither liked nor approved it, but it is difficult for the adoring and indulgent father of a beautiful girl to forbid her the things she most desires and his means cannot afford, especially when they are offered by one with the claims of close relationship. Miguel's visits were repeated. His big car made quick work of the spin of about two hundred and fifty kilometers over the low bracken covered hills and gorges known as the Montagnes Noires to La Haye, the nearest

center across the promontory from Cherbourg and looking out toward the island of Jersey.

For some reason this young bull of the pampas, whose *hacienda* was far inland, found a singular fascination in that seascape and in the sea itself, for he always begged his uncle to take him out in his little yawl. The count, wary of him at first, seemed gradually to fall under the spell of his vivid personality, and indulged his nephew's desire to learn the handling of his boat. Annik always went with them and usually the *mousse,* the fisher lad who slept aboard the boat in the cuddy forward, and took care of her.

But there was one person who did not fall under the spell of Miguel, and that was Raoul. He disliked and distrusted this Argentine cousin from the start, though obliged to be rather more than polite, politic. Raoul had made a good thing of his purchase. But as Miguel began to shower Annik with costly gifts, Raoul scented danger. First cousins often marry in France, and Miguel was of age and master of the bulk of his fortune.

Corentine kept out of it. She came once with Miguel to spent part of the day, and was politely enough received.

And all this while the love affair of the beautiful Annik and the dashing pampered pampas *toro* was blazing under cover of the hatches of cousinly prerogative, but with a flame so incandescent that it made no smoke at all.

In the case of Miguel, an *étranger,* there was not required the parents' consent that certainly would not have been accorded him. Corentine was intensely ambitious for the future of her son. Just what pressure Annik may have brought to bear to get her father's duly attested permission to marry her cousin is not known. At any rate, they were properly married before Corentine guessed what was going on.

The count made the best of it and Corentine the worst. Flinging aside all inborn respect for caste, she rushed over to the chateau and treated her brother-in-law to a scene that might have reached the point of physical violence had not Miguel, with the assistance of two chauffeurs and

a valet, dragged his mother out, shoved her into her limousine, and ordered her driven back to Quimper.

Under the circumstances it was, of course, impossible for Miguel to take his bride to his mother's house and as the young man seemed really to like his father-in-law, he yielded readily enough to his urgent request that they make their home at the chateau. A small army of workmen turned one end of it into a veritable love nest, in curious contrast to the ascetic austere barrenness of the count's quarters, which he preferred left undisturbed.

Raoul had charge of these operations, and as a sensible if broken hearted young man he made the best of it. But his visits to the chateau were now confined to business ones.

Matters went fairly well, then, for about a year. Corentine sulked or swore in Quimper, though Miguel went frequently to see her.

Then, tentatively at first, the cloven hoof of the pampas toro began to poke out from under its panoply. Sharp, stifled cries that were not entirely of fear or anger were heard by the servants, though unreported by the foreign ones. Annik appeared one day with bruises on her lovely face, saying she had tripped and fallen against a chair. At a dinner party in the Hotel Normandie at Deauville to which they had driven over, she surprised the other guests by appearing tulle throated, long sleeved, and slightly drunk, her explanation being that she had caught cold in driving over, *froidet-chaud*—taken a chill, and was full of aspirin and *cognac*.

The sharp pointed horns were not slow in following the pawing cloven hoof. It would seem impossible that the count, whose senses were acute, could have been deaf to some of the outcries from the love nest, these less stifled than at first. More than that, he seemed no less deaf to certain mutterings among the older servants, blind to their dark yet frightened glances at his son-in-law, and insensible to the contraction of his beloved daughter's body on one or two occasions when he took her by the shoulders and drew her to him for a kiss.

He was obliged to take cognizance one day when Raoul, pale and quivering and his blue eyes burning like the sun on polar ice, for the young man was of the fair type of Frenchman, demanded a private interview of which the conversation may be reconstructed somewhat in this fashion:

"Monsieur, I cannot stand it any longer. That animal of a *gaucho* maltreats her."

"Nonsense, *mon enfant.*"

"Are you then blind, count, and deaf as well? Have you not seen her bruises, heard her cries?"

"My dear boy," said the count soothingly, "you imagine all this. I do not say but what they have their disagreements."

"Disagreements! Do you call it a disagreement when Annik goes about with her lip puffed and swollen? He treats her to something more than slaps. Auguste, in passing under the window, heard the swish of a riding whip and a muffled cry. Her bruises are not all visible. If she were to be stripped—" he stopped and reddened.

The count was pale. "I will remonstrate with Miguel," he said. "But you must not listen to servants' tittle-tattle."

"There is no need," Raoul cried. "I use the evidence of my own senses, and if you will pardon me, monsieur, I cannot help but wonder at the dullness of your own."

"I tell you, *mon cher* Raoul," said the count, "that young married people, both of whom have had always their own way, are bound to clash at first. They must find their own adjustment. Nobody can find it for them."

"The trouble is, monsieur," Raoul persisted, "she refuses to be dominated by him. He inspires her with horror and loathing, but no fear at all. It is only her pride that compels her to keep on living with him. I have made a study of Annik."

This reconstructed conversation was merely indicated by M. Pervier, who had no more to go on than that such remonstrances were made by Raoul from time to time. They were reported to Pervier by the old butler, Auguste. This faithful servitor loved Annik as perhaps he would

never have loved a child of his own, because there was the element of doglike devotion to the mistress. Auguste was the sort to render this. His father had been lighthouse keeper of the tall spire out on the point, and until his early middle age, when he retired from the sea to serve the seigneur, Auguste had been an arctic whaler. Like most such simple, elemental natures, the old fellow, whose domestic service had begun the year before Annik's birth, had assumed from the first a watchdog guardianship of her, even though at times she threw things at him. But so one sometimes does at one's dog.

If the count remonstrated with Miguel, it would appear to have been a wasted effort. Things went from bad to worse. Annik spent three days in bed, a damp towel over her face. It was the first time she had ever been known to be ill in bed.

Miguel no longer seemed to reciprocate the friendliness of his father-in-law. He appeared to treat the count with that sort of indifferent regard that borders on contempt, except that it is less positive.

There remained still one common ground on which Miguel and his uncle-father-in-law met with a certain sympathy. This, curiously enough, was when they went aboard the count's little yawl for a brief tussel with the channel chop.

As for Raoul, his hatred of Miguel became so evident that the Argentine could himself no longer ignore it. He seemed, in fact, to find a malicious satisfaction in the *double-entendre* of his polite remarks to the young Frenchman.

And so to the tragedy, all the makings of which Pervier had so precisely described.

Most unhappily this arrived on Easter Sunday, when all the Christian world should be uplifted. The local population of the region had gone in a body to Bayeux, where a special mass was to be celebrated in the splendid old cathedral, the archbishop officiating, and a fête to follow. There were special trains and the summer tourist omnibuses requisitioned and other transportation. Miguel had

wished to go, but the day proved threatening with a sea mist that was not yet a fog, and a fine drizzle with a westerly wind that was raw and penetrating. Annik preferred to remain by her open fire.

This started a quarrel. Auguste, the *maitre d'hôtel,* whose nerves were showing the strain of these jars that were becoming more frequent and more severe, went to the count, who was at his books in his somber study, and begged that he go with Miguel to Bayeux, leaving Annik to spend her day in peace, if not in happiness. The count, as usual, pretended that the disagreement was of no serious importance, but even as they talked his words were belied by the storming of Miguel, who had a harsh and strident voice, and this presently was punctuated by Annik's scream.

The sweat burst out on Auguste's forehead. With the privilege of the faithful old family servant whose protests sometimes border on disrespect he cried, "It is intolerable. Have you no longer any love for her? Or is it that you are afraid of him? Because I at least am not."

"Be silent, thou—and leave me in peace." With a muttered "Aug'h'h—quel misère," Auguste slammed out. The ugly echoes of strife continued to be audible.

Looking out presently, the count saw Auguste in fishermen's oilskins and sou'wester making for the gate in the rough hedge that led to his path down the side of the cliffs. The count instantly guessed at the intention of the butler. Driven to desperation by the increasing maltreatment of his beloved mistress, the old fellow had determined to fulfill his oft repeated threat to interfere. But he wanted backing when he did so and, despairing of getting any from the count, he meant now to appeal to Raoul, should he be at home.

The count continued with his reading, deaf to the faint sounds of violent discord that may have reached him. He was in costume *d'intérieur,* slippers and a dressing gown. It was ten of the morning. Then, about ten minutes after Auguste had gone, there came a sharp rap at the door, and Miguel entered the study without waiting to be

bidden. He was in rough tweed knickerbockers, a guernsey, and norfolk coat.

"Annik does nothing but sulk," he said. "Since she refuses to go to Bayeux I have decided to sail over to St. Helier" (on Jersey, and about 20 kilometers).

"But the weather is villainous," the count objected, "and I have given Pierre (the *mousse*) permission to go to Bayeux."

"There is a little mist, but no great amount of wind. I think it is going to clear. And I can pick up a boatman in the buvette."

It was evident that Miguel was determined. He was an obstinate young man. The count then decided that this might be better than for him to remain at home in a bad humor. "Very well," he said. "In that case I should like to go with you. But I shall have to dress."

"Bon," Miguel grunted, "then I shall go down and make sail."

He went out and took the path down the cliffs. The count watched him disappear, then slipped up to speak to his daughter. He found her on her bed, sobbing. One bare round arm showed the purpling imprints of gripping fingers, and there was a chair capsized.

"I am going for a little promenade on the sea with Miguel," said the count, softly. "Let us hope that it may improve his temper." (The foregoing was the testimony of an eavesdropping maid.)

The count dressed in his boating costume and went out. At the head of the path, near the brink of the cliffs, he met Raoul, who was alone. The count asked where Auguste might be.

"He is returning presently with some people who are going to Bayeux in a car," Raoul said. "I did not wait." The road to Bayeux led up past the chateau.

"Then you might as well go back," said the count. "For one thing, you have no right to interfere or listen to servants' gossip, and for another, Miguel and I are going to sail over to St. Helier."

Raoul did not argue. He went back down the path with

the count. They parted at the foot of it, Raoul going to his house, the count to his boat that was breasted up against the quay, inside the little breakwater. He found Miguel below in the cabin, smoking and nursing an ankle which he said he had given a bad twist coming down the rough path. At the count's suggestion he took off his shoe and stocking and put his foot in a bucket of cold sea-water.

A mile or so off shore, Miguel came up saying that his ankle was all right, merely a sharp wrench of no consequence. He took the tiller from the count, who hoisted the mainsail. Such exercises were his single recreation physically, and he enjoyed them. Miguel had learned to steer, by wind and compass, and took pride and pleasure in his new accomplishment. The boat was in fact the only bond of sympathy between the two, but a strong one.

Running counter now to weather wisdom, the wind, instead of hauling, backed southwest and the weather thickened. The count advised that they return, but Miguel insisted that they hold on for Jersey. A vicious chop sprang up, the tide running ebb. The count went below to get into oilskins and sea boots. The boat was swashing through a tide rip, stanchly but with a good deal of commotion. While struggling into his damp boots, the count heard Miguel overhead, gone forward perhaps to sway up the peak haliard, or something of that sort. The boat trimmed pretty well, but had the fault of sail balance common to most French fishing boats in carrying a bit of a lee helm with the big jib hauled flat, so that if left to sail herself too long alone she was apt to wear and jibe.

This now is what evidently happened. The count, feeling a lull of movement and straightening of angular heel, shouted "Tribord, Tribord," and clambered up the companionway, one boot half on. At the same moment the boat jibed. She wallowed in a confusion of tormented cross chop, nothing alarming under intelligent control, or without it, for that matter. But as the count shoved his

head and shoulders up through the hatch, he discovered to his anguish no sign of Miguel.

And there continued to be no sign of Miguel, either aboard or overboard. He was gone, evaporated, consumed, or swallowed up. There was no longer any such living person. And so far, also, there had been discovered no such dead one.

Such was the statement of the Count de Domcourt. It would appear at first glance a fairly invulnerable one. And such it might have remained, had not Corentine, raging like a she bear deprived of her cub, attacked it fang and claw, with vast wealth and the legal skill and shifty testimony that such can buy.

The Procureur de la Republic had now a terrible indictment of the count prepared to launch. Some parts of it were true, others obviously bought, this latter consisting of threats never uttered, but sworn to on a stack of sacred relics if required. Threats made by the count in the hearing of Miguel's imported servants, these obviously false but legal evidence.

The count, for his part, had steadfastly refused to prepare any defense at all. He would not discuss the tragedy with a lawyer or anybody else. Having once made his sworn deposition, he rested his case, as one might say, and would there continue to rest it. In England or America, where the onus is on the prosecuting attorney to prove the guilt of the accused, he would have been safe enough, especially in the absence of a *corpus delicti*. But in France, where the accused must prove his innocence and the factor of motive is given such tremendous importance, it was different. Especially as here was Corentine raving for his head, buying perjurers wholesale, ready and willing to buy life annuities for judge and jury, pension the whole Service de la Correction, provide for the press, and generally plaster that region with Argentine gold if only she could drag her brother-in-law to the guillotine.

Everybody in the place believed that the count had lured Miguel out for a sail, watched his chance, and

shoved him overboard. And nobody in the place blamed him. But a court of law would blame him. Corentine's lawyers would take care of that.

Things were looking blacker and blacker for the count, but he didn't seem to care. Then one day the helmsman of a Paimpol codfisher, homeward bound from the Grand Banks and a bit off his reckoning coming up channel in the mist, so that he fetched on past that famous little port where the whole fleet is blessed by the bishop on putting out, came forward and swore to the guilt of Count de Domcourt. His testimony was that overshooting his mark and mistaking the point of Jersey for *Les Sept Isles,* he had, on discovering his error, sailed around Jersey to coast back to Paimpol. Through the murk he had passed a little yawl built like a fisherman, but painted white luffed up into the wind. He had slipped past on the weather side of her, and just as she was dissolved in the *brume* he had witnessed what appeared to be a struggle between two men on the far side of her from his weather gauge. He could not swear that one of these men had thrust the other overboard, but was willing to take oath that a blow was struck, having seen an arm flung up.

On the strength of this evidence the count was arrested for the murder of nephew and son-in-law, Don Miguel do Castello, and held without bail pending trial.

It was then that Raoul de Malartic came forward with what he claimed to be a full confession of the murder of Miguel.

His deposition stated that on Easter Sunday, the morning of the crime, the old butler Auguste came to Raoul's house greatly agitated, and begged his support in taking steps to protect his young mistress from the brutality of her husband. Raoul, who had long loved Annik with every hope of marrying her until the coming of Miguel, had been tormented to the point of madness at what he knew to be going on and what he seemed impotent to prevent. He laid stress on Annik's injuries and the count's mistaken efforts to palliate the situation.

Without waiting for Auguste, who was nearly in a col-

lapse from agitation, too infirm to climb back up the path, Raoul hurried by that route to the chateau. At a point more than halfway to the top, where the precipice hung sheer over the surf breaking on the rocks below, Raoul met Miguel coming down. At sight of this pampered brute whom he so fiercely hated, a madness seized Raoul. The opportunity offered by this spot to put an end forever to his brutalities no doubt suggested the suppression of them for all time.

Miguel greeted him with a mocking jeer. Then as they were about to pass, Raoul, who was on the side of the cliff, yielded to an insistent impulse. He turned suddenly, seized the unsuspecting Argentine by his shoulders, propelled him violently for the eight or ten feet to the brink, and thrust him over.

Raoul went on then to the top where he met the count who sent him back as described. The tide was about an hour off the ebb, and another hour later Raoul made his way along the shore to a cavern, where he found the body of Miguel on the shingle—round limestone pebbles that often contained their little free nucleus of flint.

So far as Raoul could ascertain Miguel, stunned by the shock of the fall, had drowned. The body didn't appear to have struck the rocks. Raoul secreted it in a crevice of the crags. Then after dark, a thick night but still, he took a small boat, sculled round there, dragged the corpse to the water's edge, secured it to the boat with a turn of line and, towing it out into the tideway at that time running swiftly ebb, gave it to the current.

Raoul's claim was that the count had witnessed his act from the top of the cliff. Desiring then to shield Raoul, the count had concocted the whole story of his having started to sail for Jersey with Miguel and of Miguel's falling overboard. Raoul pointed out that the count had ingeniously fabricated the incident of Miguel's twisted ankle to account for his not being seen aboard the boat by any who might be going in or out of the *buvette* at the head of the *cale* or along the *quai*, though there was scarcely anybody about. Raoul also pointed out that so

far nobody had testified to having seen Miguel between the time he left the chateau and was supposed to have gone aboard the boat. Corentine's lawyers had not thought to purchase such witnesses, because the count himself had stated that Miguel had been aboard the boat.

The count. Raoul averred, had assumed responsibility for what he claimed to have happened not only because he desired to shield Raoul, for whom he had sincere affection, but because he thought he saw a way of doing so with no danger to himself of being convicted of the murder of Miguel whatever people might suspect. He had sailed off with Miguel and returned without him. *Voilà tout!* The count held that his story must be accepted legally for lack of any proof against him and that when two men go off together in a boat, then one does not necessarily become the keeper of the other and responsible to the law for his safe return. The defense of Cain.

The testimony of Auguste appeared to corroborate Raoul's confession, though given haltingly and with unwillingness. It seemed pretty tough for Auguste who, while devoted to the count, still had affection for Raoul, as did about all the people of the place. Besides, Raoul had come forward like a man to save his friend when, however dubious the count's position, it meant for Raoul nothing less than the guillotine. For he didn't even claim a quarrel in self-defense, a blow from the haughty overbearing *gaillard* of a purse proud Argentine who was known to knock people about. The inference was no doubt accurate, that Raoul preferred the guillotine to the life term that he must otherwise expect.

Pervier had questioned Auguste closely, but with no added light to be thrown on the conflicting stories, both of which were firmly adhered to by their narrators. Pervier, a painstaking man, and precise, had given careful attention to the matter of elapsed time, from which it would appear that old Auguste had gone down the path slowly and carefully. So far as Pervier could discover it had taken him about twice as long as it took himself (Pervier) to go down from the chateau to Raoul's home

at the pace of a woman, or a shambling old man. Questioned about this, Auguste answered that he sometimes suffered from *vertige,* giddiness when at a height, so that he would have to stop and sit down and wait a few minutes for his head to clear.

Then, like a tigress balked of her prey, Corentine called up all her reserves. She asserted vehemently that it was impossible for her to understand how anybody could look into the eyes of the count and not read the guilt behind them. And in this connection, Pervier dryly admitted that many had remarked the evasiveness of the count's regard on being questioned.

So here the matter stood. Less for the actual legal value of its finding than in the hope of the fresh evidence that might be forthcoming from the investigation by the famous mind reader who had so many times not only solved such problems, but had them substantiated by subsequent confession, it was officially requested of Jacques that he go down to the local prefecture and examine both the count and Raoul, who were confined to the jail hard by. To this Jacques consented.

To Normandy he went. I was kindly invited to go with him.

As Jacques had always insisted that he be not kept waiting after hearing the detailed account of the case, lest he begin to form opinions that might distort his mental reading, the examination took place immediately on our arrival. Neither the count nor Raoul protested against it, whether because they thought Jacques was a fraud (as I confess I did) or for other reasons of their own. So exact had been Pervier's minute description of their personalities, that I had been able to visualize them with much precision, except that the count looked younger and more robust than I had pictured him, a handsome man, high bred, composed and dignified, a gentleman "without fear and without reproach," whatever he had done. Raoul also was the fair, steady-eyed Frank, though slender of physique.

Old Auguste was, however, a surprise to me, because

my mental picture of a French *maitre d'hôtel* was based entirely on the finished metropolitan sort, or of the stage and movies, an upper servant of the polished kind, deferential, suave, a sort of domestic automaton usually with a bunch of side whiskers and perhaps a vinous eye. So I was scarcely prepared for the provincial sort of functionary that Auguste proved to be, skin like old saddle leather with a multitude of fine lines that were not yet wrinkles except for the crow's-feet at the corners of his blue, frosty eyes, a thatch of hair like an Aleutian islander's that grew down in front to a peak almost in contact with the bushy, grizzled eyebrows that ran straight across his forehead without interruption and would have furnished a creditable mustache for a Japanese war mask. Strong, yellow teeth, some of which were lacking, face shaven, but a day or two late, so that the white sprouting hairs gave it an ashen look.

There were not as many present to witness the examination as in the Vibart case. Held *in camera* unannounced and the mind reading of Jacques not admissible evidence in itself unless followed by confession, no lawyers or reporters were admitted. There were only the local police, a few from the Grand Prefecture and two or three distinguished psychologists.

Rather to my surprise, Jacques asked first to examine Raoul. Following his usual technique, he seated himself opposite the young man, and with a murmur of apology leaned forward and took his head between his hands, looking thoughtfully into the blue eyes that met those of Jacques unflinchingly.

But at this moment an interruption occurred. Rather more than that, it was in the nature of an irruption. A woman's impassioned voice outside the door demanded vehemently that she be admitted. The guard stationed there answered in a curt military tone that it was impossible.

"I insist! I have the right! Is it not the assassin of my son that is to be examined? It is against the law—a dirty trick of the police. Get out of my way, animal."

There came the sound of a shuffle, a frenzied gurgle of rage. Somebody inside shot the bolt of the door.

Jacques turned his head sharply. "Let her come in."

His direction was silently obeyed. Corentine burst into the room. She was still a beautiful woman physically, but at this moment her features were distorted with rage and suspicion.

"What is all this?" she stormed. "Have you brought that *fripon* of an American, that charlatan?"

Jacques rose, turned and faced her with a slight sardonic bow. Corentine seemed a little staggered at the calm and elegant individual with whom she found herself confronted. Always immaculately dressed, his uncommon type of beauty, seraphic when a little boy, was now in ripe manhood of the archangel sort, a Gabriel or Saint Michael.

Corentine's eyes opened wide. Then she asked sullenly, "Have you examined him?"

"No, madam. I was about to examine the mind of Monsieur Raoul de Malartic. With your kind permission I shall proceed."

Jacques resumed his position facing Raoul, lightly touching the sides of his head with his spread fingers, beautifully formed like the rest of him.

Then without the slightest hesitation he said quietly: "This young man is absolutely innocent of any greater crime than that of lying to save his friend. The mind of Monsieur de Malartic does not even know how Don Miguel met his death. It believes, however, that the Count de Domcourt's story is truthful in every detail. But he believes the count to be in grave danger of conviction for murder through the paid testimony of false witnesses. Such is the love borne the count and his daughter Annik by M. de Malartic that he prefers to go himself to the guillotine rather than see these two suffer calamity. It is needless for me to read further."

Corentine sprang up, her face pale and fiercely triumphant. In her relief at this finding she ignored what had been said of her method of procuring witnesses.

"Did I not tell you?" she cried. "I have been unjust to monsieur. He has the vision. He sees as I see. It was a *brave geste* of the young man, but one must be a fool to be deceived by it. And one must also be a fool to believe the story of my miserable brother-in-law."

"Silence, madame," said a gendarme sternly, and pushed her back into her chair.

Raoul said nothing. He seemed a little dazed. Jacques turned to him with a smile. "That is all, monsieur. I shall not ask you to confirm my reading."

He glanced at the jailer. "Please bring in Monsieur le Comte."

A door was opened and the count entered. With a step that showed no sign of faltering, he took the chair vacated by Raoul. Jacques, with the same gentle apology, leaned forward and placed his hands lightly in contact with both sides of the head of the aristocrat. As before, he did not hesitate an instant on looking into the steadfast eyes that for the first time, according to Pervier, looked with no evasion into those of his interlocutor, this time a purely mental one.

"The mind of the Count de Domcourt," said Jacques in a tone that was almost light, "tells me that, like many a gallant gentleman, he has lied intelligently in what he feels to be a just cause.

"He tells me he is not only innocent of the murder of Miguel, but that he does not actually know how this unfortunate young man met his death. The count has, in fact, no positive assurance that Miguel is indeed dead. But the count strongly suspects that his butler, Auguste, for whom he cherishes a deep affection, knows what happened to Miguel."

The contrast between his smooth, even speech and the unexpectedness of his clear statement was so astounding that until the pause even Corentine was stupefied, struck speechless. Then, as her normally stolid mind grasped the significance of what had been said, she burst out with a snarl of rage.

Springing up, her face aflame, her first invective was

directed at Jacques, "Au-au-qh! *Quel salopin!* The dirty fraud! The—the—" Words failing her, in her astonished fury she would have rushed at Jacques: seemed, in fact, gathering for a spring when a stalwart gendarme grabbed her.

Then, as she paused for breath and to gather fresh supply, Jacques ordered, briefly, "Take her out."

The door slammed shut behind her. At the same moment old Auguste sprang to his feet, trying vainly to articulate. But Jacques' voice cut into this effort like a cold blade.

"*Tais-toi*—shut up!" he said, so fiercely that Auguste's effort was instantly hushed. Two agents saw to it that he remained hushed. Jacques turned to the count, who had sat immobile, frozen throughout this rumpus.

He resumed his attitude of examination, and continued as though no interruption had occurred.

"The mind of Count de Domcourt tells me that what actually happened was this: The count, long tormented by the brutality with which his beloved daughter's husband treated her, had hardened his heart against interference, because convinced that the moment for such had not yet arrived, but sooner or later would arrive. He reasoned that to act too soon would be only to prolong the misery and to make the radical cure of it indefinitely postponed. He desired to be sure not only of just cause for divorce but of his daughter's final desire to put her husband from her. It seemed to him that it would be better to risk even a serious physical injury to her person that might be healed than the sort of half hearted rupture that might also be patched up. Miguel, by his very cruelty, was unconsciously playing into the count's hand.

"But others were not so patient—Raoul, who does not enter into this case at all, except as one may appreciate his artistry, and the faithful servitor, Auguste, who slew Miguel in self-defense."

Jacques did not pause. On the contrary, he went on stridently, as if to silence interruption. "The count's mind further tells me that on this day of tragedy he was

infinitely relieved when, after the none too respectful appeal by Auguste that Miguel be stopped from maltreating his young wife, Miguel himself came down to say that he was going on the water. The count was making every effort to endure the hideous state of affairs, a good deal as a general might prolong a battle and from his point of observation watch the massacre of his loved troops until the moment to launch a decisive attack should have been reached. This was daily becoming more difficult because of the importunities of the two men who, each in his separate way, loved Annik so dearly, Raoul and Auguste. It was as if to the great military strategist the two members of his staff whom he found hardest to hold had kept saying *'Mon général,* we are being slaughtered in our tracks. We implore you to unleash the counter offensive before it is too late.'

"Auguste, on this Easter morning, was beside himself with rage. When he found his master impossible to budge he set out to fetch Raoul, not because he was afraid of Miguel, but because he wanted the witness of a *tiers,* a third outside person, to whatever might happen when he interfered. At least, that is what the mind of the count believed. He saw that Auguste's restraint had reached its limits, and, dreading what might then befall, the count was infinitely relieved when Miguel came down and proposed a promenade on the sea.

"Rid of Auguste, the count went up for a few words with his daughter and to dress for the boat. Going then to the head of the cliffs, he looked down and saw Raoul coming up the path and nearly to the top. They exchanged a few words, when Raoul, at the count's suggestion, went back to his house and the count on to his boat. But, to his surprise, Miguel was not there. Miguel did not come, and Miguel had told him he would go down and hoist the sail and have all in readiness to leave.

"As the moments passed and Miguel did not appear the count began to have his suspicions that some ill had befallen him. Here were two men with every reason to hate this maltreater of Annik who might have met him

on the path—Auguste and Raoul. The count's reasoning told him that more probably it was the former, as there had been plenty of time for Miguel, an active and athletic young man, to get down and to the boat before Raoul had started up.

"Auguste, on the contrary, had not left long before Miguel, and as the butler was an old man whose movements were deliberate and whose steps, like that of most old men more or less addicted to alcohol, were less secure in a descent than in mounting, Auguste might have gone down so slowly that Miguel would have overtaken him.

"It was then that the mind of the count, a closely reasoning one, the mind of the philosopher, assured him that something terrible had happened and that it concerned his son-in-law and his butler. He made sail and drifted out. He desired to reflect, and this reflection served the more deeply to convince him that Miguel and Auguste had clashed, back there on the path. He knew of Miguel's arrogance and that he was wont to use his strength in domineering fashion to chastise any servant, his own or others, who presumed to cross him. He knew that Auguste's statement that he was not afrai l of Miguel was no idle boast. Auguste had been a man of the sea in that roughest of sea service—that is, aboard an arctic whaler—and also a service that is sanguinary. The count could reconstruct the interview.

"Miguel had overtaken Auguste and questioned him about his errand. Auguste had answered him. Followed a blow from Miguel and a defensive action from Auguste. For all the count knew at that moment, both might have gone over the cliff.

"The count sailed about in his boat, out there in the mist. He came back to learn that Miguel had disappeared and that Auguste had returned to the chateau. The count drew his own conclusions. *Noblesse oblige* dictated that he protect the faithful servitor who had struck in defense of his mistress, the daughter of the count, and the count thought in his simplicity of a way to shield Auguste from suspicion with no great risk to himself. He had not

counted on the power of gold, and he reasoned that it would be better not to question Auguste, who would have intelligence enough to understand the means taken by his master to shield him."

Jacques dropped his hands and arose. I glanced at the count. It needed no words on his part to tell that the workings of his mind had been correctly read. He seemed to be in a sort of stasis. Looking then at Raoul, I judged that the astonishment portrayed by his frank face was less for Jacques' psychic gift than because it was the first inkling the young man had of the truth. He was ready to sacrifice himself to save the count, whom he really believed to have made way with Miguel, but he would have felt under no obligation to assume the penalty for Auguste's act.

For Auguste's part, this old man of the sea stood with his shoulders hunched and his corded neck sunk into a collar several sizes too large in an attitude suggestive of an osprey in captivity, and there was the same bleak glare in his bright, glittering eyes. He seemed then about to speak, his thyroid cartilages working up and down.

But Jacques, evidently sensing this, turned on him and said, "This faithful servant should now be examined. As for Monsieur Raoul, it is not necessary to do more than compliment him on his devotion, his courage, and his ingenuity. He is a most admirable liar. There is a bright place in the sun for such. Without the confession of the real slayer of Miguel it would be impossible to break down the fabrication of Raoul. But, with the permission of those present, I should like to look into the mind of Auguste."

This naturally was accorded. Auguste seated himself with a gesture of resignation, as if to say, "The game is up. A man can but do his best."

In a slightly different pitch, almost a lilting one, Jacques began to interpret the mental workings of the old sea dog, who only from middle life had given up the sea to serve the seigneur of the place.

"Like most individuals of direct and simple mental processes, the mind of Auguste reads like a child's primer. On that fateful morning he left the count and started for the path in a passion of rage that caused him, as we say graphically in America, 'to see red.' The swirling mists of rage that sent the blood to his head obscured his vision and, no doubt, likewise affected his locomotion. His step, already shuffling, spastic, as the doctors say, was unsteady. It made his descent of the rough path insecure, so that a little way down he stopped and sat on a rock to get himself in hand.

"It was then that fate decreed the coming of Miguel. Perhaps this ill-starred young man had overheard the passage between Auguste and his master. Perhaps it had been reported to him by one of his slinking spies. It is even possible that Miguel hurried to overtake Auguste and to chastise him.

"At any rate, he demanded to know Auguste's errand. The butler told him. Miguel, an athlete, was not the sort to brook such defiance, least of all from a servant whom he must have known detested him. But in this case he had reckoned without his host. Auguste's unsteady gait was by no means due to the infirmity of age, or senile incoördination, but the rolling gait of sailors for years accustomed to the swinging deck. And it does not need a mind reader to perceive the absurdity of what he deposed to account for the long time taken him to go down the path—that he sometimes suffered from height vertigo and was obliged to pause to clear his head. Would an individual who had passed his boyhood in the tall spire of the Pen Marsh lighthouse, then in later years gone on lookout in the crow's nest of a wallowing whaler and laid out on the yards to reef and furl in an arctic blizzard, have suffered from giddiness of altitude? About as much as a sea eagle or a gull.

"The mind of Auguste tells me he welcomed the attack of this young man, whom he hated, with the fierce joy that he might one time have felt at hurling his harpoon into a charging whale or dropping his blubber spade on

the soft head of a shark tearing at the leviathan's carcass close to where the whaler stands upon it.

"And Miguel, not counting on a fierce and savage defense that had beneath it a long score of brutalities practiced on this old man's beloved young mistress, was taken off his guard. The mind of Auguste is now, as I reconstruct the episode, so seething with savage memories of this and other combats, some of them imaginary, that it swirls with blood. The pool is muddied for the moment so that it is impossible for me to read with precision. Also it is the more complex because not very clear even to himself. He was borne along on a rush of passion, a righteous rage. But this fundamental fact is clear: that he acted primarily in self-defense. He was convinced that he was fighting for his life, that if he didn't make way with Miguel then Miguel would most certainly make way with him.

"And Auguste triumphed. Whether knifed or struck with a fragment of rock, or merely seized by hands toughened to the grip of harpoons and oar and thrust along by muscles toughened by the tug and kick of wheel and tiller, Miguel was hurled over the cliff and down beneath. The breakers gathered him."

Jacques paused, let fall his hands, leaned back, and asked, gently, "Have I read your mind aright?"

A sort of palsy seized Auguste. He nodded and mumbled, "Monsieur has read aright."

This finished Jacques' part of the affair, though not, of course, concluding the case. But it was perfectly evident that those present were not only profoundly impressed but convinced.

It occurred to me as we went away that Jacques' admitting Corentine to the séance had been a *coup de théâtre* of value. The horrid scene she made had told seriously against the woman. The shameful outburst of peasant nature reinforced by years of pampered autocracy, with the language she had used, served to nullify completely whatever respect might have been rendered her limitless wealth.

The surge of popular feeling turned hard against Corentine when, under rigid cross-examination of the crew of the Paimpol cod fisher, it was discovered that she had not circumnavigated Jersey at all. Another perjurer broke down and confessed. There was a scandal that entailed great added cost to Corentine, and in the thick of it the impassioned eloquence of the celebrated Maitre Robin got Auguste acquitted on a finding of self-defense.

HENRY SMITH WILLIAMS

THE SUBCONSCIOUS WITNESS

"It is said to be a wise child that knows his own father," Dr. Goodrich commented. "It would certainly be a wise father that could establish a claim to paternity, or disprove a charge of it, by a blood test."

The physician was smiling quizzically. "Jesting aside," he continued, "the thing can't be done at the present state of our knowledge—which is fortunate or unfortunate according to the point of view one happens to hold."

"But there are different types of blood," I demurred. "No one makes a blood transfusion nowadays without first finding out whether the prospective donor has the same type of blood as the recipient. When bloods of different types are mixed, the corpuscles stick together or dissolve, and the very deuce is to pay."

"Of course. But that has nothing to do with the paternity matter. It has been proved that a child may have blood of a different type from that of its mother, let alone its father. Whatever the chemical conditions may be that determine the different types, they are not directly heritable. I'm afraid the case you speak about can't be settled with the aid of the microscope alone."

As he spoke, the examiner had taken up a little rack of test-tubes that stood on the table before him. He inspected the tubes critically, and nodded as if in approval.

"If the blood tests fail in the case you mention," he said, "fortunately there are other questions they can answer for us. These test-tubes furnish a case in point. Do you note the little flocculent deposit, like so much undissolved snow, in this tube here, and in this other one, and this, and this?"

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I nodded assent.

"And these other tubes, as you will agree, are perfectly clear."

Again I assented.

"Well, these are all specimens of blood—human blood. But they came from different sources. Even the four specimens that give the precipitate are not from the same subject. All of them are from known individuals. One of these individuals has committed a crime—homicide, to be exact—whereas the other three have done nothing, so far as I know, that brings them within my official purview. But the difficulty is that this test-tube experiment doesn't tell me 'which from t'other,' so to speak."

"Tell me about it," I urged.

The examiner hesitated a moment, stroking his chin. "There isn't much more to tell just yet," he said presently. "However, what you see in these tubes—just the faint little cloudiness—is not without importance, for it does serve to exonerate no fewer than six people of suspicion of having committed a certain crime, while at the same time involving four other persons."

The quizzical smile that is so much in evidence whenever Dr. Goodrich propounds something especially puzzling played across his features now as he added:

"Only, as I just told you, I do not know which individual in the group of four is the guilty one. To find that out, I must leave the test-tubes and fall back on another line of experiment. And that, as it happens, will interest you; for it concerns the very kind of blood-test that we were just talking about—the one by which the paternity of the child was supposed to be determined in that California case."

"But you have just condemned that test."

"For the purpose of establishing relationship of father and child, yes. Or any other relationship. But the establishment of individual identity is another matter. Our case is this: We have four persons brought under suspicion by the result of the test-tube experiment. One of the four has committed a murder. All the individuals are

known, and I have specimens of the blood of all of them. I have also a specimen of blood from the handle of the murder weapon. It has been tested and found not to be that of the victim, but to belong to type three. Now I am going to test the blood of the four suspected individuals. When we find out which types they respectively belong to, we shall perhaps be a step forwarder."

"Unless all your suspects should be found to belong to type three," I interrupted.

"Just so," said the examiner genially, already leaning over his microscope. "But that," he added, "is rather unlikely, inasmuch as there are four possible types into which they may fall. However, we shall see what we shall see."

For a few minutes the microscopist worked in silence. With deft precision he mainipulated the pipettes of blood and the glass slides on which different specimens were mixed; then one slide after another was placed on the stand of the microscope and subjected to careful scrutiny. There was nothing in the observer's expression or manner to indicate whether what he was seeing met his expectations. But presently he appeared to have finished his quest, for he pushed the microscope a little to one side and looked at me across the glass-topped table, holding one of the slides toward me as if for my inspection.

"Mechanically speaking," he said, "this is a very simple test. You have merely to mix a droplet of each of two samples of blood and watch the corpuscles under the microscope. If the two specimens of blood are of the same type, the corpuscles intermingle, and nothing tangible happens. If, on the other hand, they are of different types, a chemical battle ensues, with the result that many of the corpuscles are dissolved. That is all. And yet, in its implications, this simple experiment seems to me to be one of the most profoundly suggestive tests ever made in the entire range of scientific inquiry."

A momentary pause. Then came the explication that I eagerly awaited. It concerned, as I anticipated, philosophical rather than practical aspects of the subject. Dr.

Goodrich was using the test to aid in detecting a criminal; but for the moment his major interest lay in another direction. He was considering a problem in human personality.

"It is utterly beyond credence, is it not," he demanded, "that the personality of an individual human being should be stamped on a particle of matter so minute and so seemingly insignificant as a blood corpuscle? Consider the case. There are, as you know, about five million red corpuscles in a cubic millimeter of normal blood. And there are a million cubic millimeters in a liter, and about six liters of blood in an average human body. Let us see where that lands us."

A moment later a row of figures had been jotted across the margin of a card the center of which bore graded colors for testing the color of blood specimens, and the examiner, checking over the ciphers, commented:

"Nice row of figures, isn't it? With six liters of blood in the body, and five million red corpuscles to the cubic millimeter, we get an aggregate corpuscle population spread clear across the sheet here, with—let us see—seventeen figures to represent it. That reads 'thirty quadrillions,' I believe. Of course quadrillions don't mean anything to anybody, but if the total human population of the globe is estimated at only about one and three-quarters billion, we can make a comparison that will at least be suggestive. The simple computation shows us that there are, in general terms, sixteen million times as many red corpuscles in an average human body as there are human beings in the world.

"To go still further, a few more pencil strokes, if you care to make them, will convince you that the aggregate population of the globe, in all the successive generations of the million years or so since the human race came into being, does not equal the corpuscle population of each and every one of the human beings."

"I'll take your word for it," I conceded. "But what has all that to do with your microscopic test?"

The physician waved his hand expressively. "Why,

simply this," he said. "Each and every corpuscle, of all the quadrillions, would appear to have its individual personality—its likes and dislikes, if you will. The proof is found in the fact that each corpuscle can abide mingling with corpuscles only of its own type. All the corpuscles in any given human organism are of one type, and there is no clear evidence that the type in any given case ever changes, from cradle to grave. Between the members of one group and any other there are profound and ineradicable differences, making mutual intermingling impossible; yet these differences are in no wise accounted for by anything we know of heredity or evolution. Doesn't that all seem mysterious and wonderful?"

"It does indeed," I readily admitted. "But turning from generals to particulars, what does the test you have just made reveal concerning the personalities of the corpuscles of these four people whom you are trailing?"

Dr. Goodrich eyed me tolerantly, and drew a deep breath. His appearance was that of one who suddenly recalls a forgotten project. But his next remark showed that the data connected with the task in hand had been only pigeonholed, by no means forgotten.

"Well, things might be worse," he commented reflectively. "All the specimens might be, as you have cheerfully suggested, of one type, which would help us not at all. But it isn't as bad as that. One specimen falls in group one, and another in group two. So those two people are eliminated—exonerated of any suspicion. But the two other specimens fall in group three. One or the other of the persons that furnished those specimens is guilty. But there is nothing in the test to show which one. We are down to two suspects, which is a big reduction from the original ten. The test-tube and the microscope have done that: but they do not tell me which of the two type three is the particular culprit I am seeking. To determine that, I must find yet another test."

"How about that good old-fashioned one, the third degree?" I ventured.

The examiner shook his head. "That," he said, "would

be of very doubtful utility indeed, because all that can be hoped from it is the exaction of a confession; and in this case there is probably no one who could possibly confess."

I pondered this cryptic remark, and admitted myself beaten. "I don't get it," I said presently. "Why could not the criminal confess if he wished to do so?"

"For the simple but adequate reason that he—or she, for one of the two remaining suspects is a woman—probably has no recollection of having committed the overt act. All the members of the party—of both parties, for that matter—were a good deal more than half seas over; and no one of them appears to be able to give a clear account of any of the events associated with the crime. Several of them were undoubtedly unconscious for some time after the accident. Others were partially sobered by the shock. But both of my present suspects were still in a dazed condition for some hours afterward. As to that, there is ample evidence."

I realized now that the examiner was divulging, in the roundabout way that often pleases him, the nature of the particular crime that he was investigating. His reference to an "accident" in the same breath with mention of the "overt act," coupled with the comments on the condition of the participants, left in my mind no room for doubt that the case was one that had been featured so much in the newspaper headlines.

The essentials of the story, as I now passed them in mental review, were these: There had been a head-on collision late one night on the Coney Island road. A big touring-car, with seven passengers, had apparently swung too far into the center of the road as it met a closed four-passenger car, and the result, curiously, had been more disastrous for the big car than for the little one.

The passengers were spilled in every direction more or less indiscriminately, in the midst of broken glass and general wreckage; but by a miracle all but one were still alive when help arrived, though several were badly cut and bruised, and nearly all were in a dazed condition.

The one individual who had lost his life was the owner of the touring-car, the well-known broker, Jason Bettersee. It appeared that he himself had been at the wheel of the big car, and so had been directly responsible for the accident. The impact had thrown him free of the car, well over to one side of the road, where his body was found face-down, the crushed skull apparently accounting for the unfortunate fatality.

The morning papers contained no hint of anything beyond the apparent facts just cited. It was noted that Bettersee's wife, who was said to have sat beside her husband, had escaped serious injury, though she was severely bruised, and suffered from shock. The other members of the party included several men and women fairly well known in social and financial circles. They had been bound, it was supposed, for a week-end party at Bettersee's country place on the south shore.

This from the morning papers. But by the time the later editions of the evening papers appeared, there began to be rumors that things were not quite as they had at first seemed. In the first place, some reportorial sleuth had discovered that the Bettersee car had not been headed eastward at the time of the accident, but had been coming toward town, just as was the other car; and that the accident had been due not to head-on collision, but to impact of the forward right-hand wheel of the big car with the forward left-hand wheel of the smaller one it was passing.

The big car had apparently veered suddenly to the right, just as it passed; and the impact, combined perhaps with a sharp application of the emergency brake, had swung the body of the vehicle about so that it finally stopped, partly overturned, headed in nearly the opposite direction from that in which it had been going. The smaller car, which apparently had been traveling slowly, had its hood smashed in a way to suggest head-on impact, which was natural enough in view of the actual character of the catastrophe.

This new evidence made the reporter question whether

the driver of the big car had intended to cut into the small car in passing. Bettersee was known as a skilful driver, and it was hard to believe that he could have misjudged his distance on that open stretch of road sufficiently to hit the other car, there being abundant leeway for passing.

Such a surmise, however, would doubtless have come to nothing had not the reportorial interviews led to another revelation: Bettersee's young and beautiful wife, who according to first reports had been at his side in the touring-car, had in reality been a member of the company of four in the small car.

The two groups of motorists, it now appeared, had not been together during the evening; and Mrs. Bettersee herself was the only member of the smaller company who was personally known to any surviving member of the other group.

As to whether Bettersee himself could have known that his wife was touring in that part of the world with another party, no one could surmise. Certainly it seemed highly improbable that he could have known that she was in that particular car since even at that hour cars were not infrequently encountered.

But naturally enough the reporter put a pin there. Indeed, he put a good many pins there, each indicating a possible clue to a scandal that would change the entire complexion of the "accident," which had threatened to prove good for only a few columns of copy.

Very quickly, intelligent suspicion had its reward. As the reporter was scouting about, in the region of the disaster, he discovered something at the side of the road that made his heart leap for joy—or come as near to it as the heart of so experienced a sleuth is able to do. The "something" was nothing more nor less than an ordinary automobile wrench. But this particular wrench not only lay twenty or thirty feet off at the side of the roadway, where it could scarcely have come unless hurled with vigor; but it was covered with blotches that the most casual inspection revealed as blood stains.

Young Melville—that was the reporter's name—had the caution to take up the wrench only with gloved fingers and to wrap it carefully in a newspaper, in case it might bear telltale finger-prints. Then he hurried to the local hospital where the body of Bettersee still lay. By proper manipulation of official strings, he obtained permission to inspect the body.

In two minutes he knew that the dead man's skull had been crushed in by some implement of just about the size and shape of the automobile wrench that was stored in his inside coat pocket. And when he left the hospital he was walking on air. He scented the biggest beat of his hectic career.

The story got better and better, from the reporter's viewpoint, as the investigation progressed. Expert medical examination, now that it was directed properly, left no doubt that Bettersee's death was due to cranial fracture from impact of the wrench—or some implement of identical size and shape—upon the back of his head, presumably as he lay unconscious in the road.

The man had been murdered. Some one had seized the opportunity to take the broker's life, under circumstances that gave every prospect of effectively hiding the murder behind the appearance of accidental death.

But who could have done it? Obviously it must be some member of one or the other group involved in the wreck. But which individual? As to that, fortunately there was no direct evidence—otherwise a splendid mystery would have been solved all too soon.

Suggestive clues were not lacking. Several divergent ones, fortunately. And all were of such character as to add piquancy to the case, and give it front-page significance.

First, there was the salient fact that Mrs. Bettersee, much younger than her husband, and of a temperament none too domestic, was rumored to have given cause for gossip at least, through association with companions not all to her husband's liking. Second, it was distinctly more than rumored that Bettersee himself had carried on

an affair with a woman whose husband had threatened divorce proceedings in consequence—though the matter had been hushed up.

And to make the thing quite perfect—from the standpoint of public interest, of course—it was revealed that the company in which Mrs. Bettersee was disporting herself on the fatal evening included the outraged husband of Bettersee's inamorata; her particular escort, however, being a young man-about-town with whom gossip had previously linked her name rather intimately.

In all this I am only giving a condensed transcript of the mélange of fact and gossip with which the newspapers had been filled for a week or so prior to my visit to Dr. Goodrich's office. These things flashed through my mind as I now realized the import of the blood tests that the examiner had been making.

Obviously enough, the six persons whom the physician referred to as having been exonerated of suspicion by the test-tube experiment were the members of Bettersee's party, in the big car. The four persons under suspicion were as obviously the members of the other company.

I learned now that the test-tube experiment had been one with which I was already familiar, in which blood from the wrench that had been used as a murder weapon was tested for certain proteins, notably that of lobster, of which food the occupants of the smaller car were known to have partaken freely, at a shore dinner, a few hours previous to the enigmatic catastrophe.

As the test was positive, and as the occupants of the big car had not dined at the shore—nor eaten lobster elsewhere, as careful inquiry showed—this test assured Dr. Goodrich that the person whose blood stained the handle of the wrench was in the smaller party. But it gave no information beyond that, inasmuch as all four of the occupants of the wrecked car were cut and scratched from contact with shattered glass of the car windows.

I have already related that the physician had instituted a second blood test, this time using specimens gained directly from the four possible suspects, and compared

with the specimens from the murder weapon; proving that two of the four individuals had blood of the type of that found on the wrench—and at the same time exonerating the other two individuals.

Dr. Goodrich presently revealed, in response to a specific inquiry from me, that the two suspects left, after the other eight had been eliminated, were Mrs. Bettersee herself and the man—named Burton—whose wife had been the misdemeanant associated by gossip and innuendo with Bettersee's philandering.

"So far as motives are concerned," said the physician, "Burton seems a very favorable subject. Certainly he had reason to hate Bettersee, and it is a plausible enough guess that he would avail himself of such an opportunity —particularly when under the influence of liquor. But all that of course does not prove that Burton is guilty. There are plenty of reasons why Mrs. Bettersee might feel unamiably inclined toward her spouse. And she also was right on the spot. Hence the complications of my problem."

"It is indeed a problem," I said. "It would be hard to suggest a more interesting one. As I understand you, the second blood test shows that both Burton and Mrs. Bettersee have blood of the same type as that found on the weapon we know was used in the murder?"

The physician nodded. "Both number three," he said. "That places the crime on one or the other of them, but leaves us with no manner of determining which—so far as that blood test is concerned. I may add that, as both have normal blood, there is no other blood test known that can give us further aid. So far as that line of investigation is concerned, we find ourselves at an impasse."

I meditated a moment, and recalled another line of investigation in which Dr. Goodrich is an expert. I felt sure that he was thinking of the same thing. Presently I said:

"So far as I can see, there is only one other thing open to you."

"Yes," he replied, I thought rather regretfully. "I have

gone over the matter carefully, and I see no escape. I would rather not resort to that particular method, but I appear to be driven to it. I anticipated as much, and that was one reason why I welcomed your coming this evening. I do not want to make the test alone, of course; and there is no one else I would care to have present. For if things are as I expect to find them, I shall probably be inclined to act—or fail to act—in a way that some of my legal colleagues might not approve. And I wish to have entire freedom of choice."

"I think I know what you mean," I replied, "and I sympathize with your intention, as I forecast it. Anyhow, I need hardly tell you that whatever I see falls within the scope of professional privilege, and will go no further without your full approval."

"I understand that fully," said the examiner. "And now I think we will go to work, without further ado. I had sent for Mrs. Bettersee before you came, and I think she is waiting in the outer office. I will summon her, and we shall see what we shall see."

I shall describe very briefly what followed. Mrs. Bettersee proved to be as beautiful and as appealing as her published pictures—with an added charm of manner and wistfulness of expression that the photographer failed to catch. Her large dark eyes regarded Dr. Goodrich almost appealingly as she declared that she had no recollection whatever of what had transpired after the "dreadful crash."

"I believe you," said the physician, in kindly tones. "And I think I can help you to attain a peace of mind that you now lack if you will coöperate with me in a mental test that at worst can do you no harm."

"I will gladly do whatever you ask," she replied earnestly.

"I am going to ask you merely to go into a condition of hypnotic receptiveness," the physician told her, "in which you will perhaps reveal things that you have yourself forgotten. But these things, let me assure you, will be regarded by myself and by my friend here, who is also

a physician, as falling behind the veil of professional secrecy. Understanding that, do you agree to the test?"

For an instant she hesitated. Then she looked up quickly.

"Anything is better than the dreadful uncertainty that now oppresses me," she declared. "Whatever you think best, I willingly agree to."

The physician gravely inclined his head. Then he held up one hand impressively, asked the patient to fix her eyes on it intently, and presently began to intone the banal phrases used by the hypnotist, ending with the declaration:

"You are going to sleep. . . . You are sleeping."

The patient proved a most susceptible subject. She obviously plunged into deep hypnotic slumber. In a few moments, in response to the physician's request that she reënact the incidents of the fatal accident she gave one of the most dramatic and thrilling presentations of a tragedy that I have ever witnessed. I refer, of course, to stage presentations for comparison. The young woman was acting a part, but she was acting under inspiration of the subconscious mind. She was going through the scenes of the fatal night, with the fervor of original enactment.

It suffices here to tell only of the critical scene, in which the wide-eyed dreamer seized a fragment of cardboard fashioned like an automobile wrench, which Dr. Goodrich had tossed on the floor; and, springing forward, beat it fiercely against the end of a rolled-up rug in the corner of the room, which the physician had pointed out to her as the unconscious form of her husband.

Three times in rapid succession, the mock-wrench fell on the supposed head of the victim. Then the dreamer drew back, with a stifled scream. Her eyes stared wildly at the form she saw there in the corner. She hurled the weapon from her hand, as she cried out: "So you meant to kill us! that was like you. It was not the first time, but it will be the last."

The next instant, the tense figure relaxed, and the sleeper slowly collapsed, until she lay full-length on the

floor beside the carpet roll that to her sleep-self had represented the body of her husband.

Dr. Goodrich regarded the recumbent sleeper with grave benignant, tolerant eyes. He stooped presently and lifted the figure as if it were that of a child.

A moment later the young woman was sitting erect in the chair where she had sat at the beginning of the experiment. She was still as far as ever removed from waking consciousness.

"Listen to me intently," the physician commanded in a low, earnest voice. "Very soon now you will come out of this sleep, and you will remember nothing that has happened here today. Nor will you ever remember anything of the incidents of the night when your husband lost his life in that terrible accident. You will recall only that you saw the other car collide with the one in which you were. The next thing you knew, you were lying in the bed, there in the hospital. You are never to attempt to recall what may have happened during the period when you lay unconscious, under shock of the accident. Nor are you to be distressed in any way about anything that happened that night, beyond the natural grief resulting from the loss of your husband, which time will alleviate. And now—awake!"

The young woman roused, as from a deep sleep. But she apparently had no consciousness of the lapse of time. As she came to her senses, Dr. Goodrich was saying:

"Very well, Mrs. Bettersee, I think there is nothing more that I wish to ask you at present. I feel that we have all the information about the sad affair that can ever be had. It was one of those deplorable accidents that can neither be averted nor accounted for, except on the ground of the inevitable element of human carelessness. But it belongs to the past, and it is the part of wisdom to live in the present and the future. My suggestion would be that you take a trip abroad, and divert your mind as much as may be from recollections of the accident that bereaved you."

As the young woman left the office, she was walking

with head erect, drawing deep breaths, as if freed from a colossal burden. Dr. Goodrich turned to me, his face still grave.

"No man can say what would constitute sheer justice in such a case as that," he mused. "Or at least I do not pretend to be able to say. But it seems clear that Bettersee met his death while attempting to wreck that lighter car with his heavy one. He may or may not have been dead before he received the blows on the head. But in any case he got no worse than he deserved. And so far as official action from this quarter is concerned, the case is forever closed."

"And an excellent evening's work done, in my opinion," I commented in all sincerity.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

D'ARTAGNAN AND THE DUEL

King Louis XIV took Saint-Aignan by the arm, and passed into the adjoining room. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "Has anything serious happened to De Guiche?"

"Yes, sire, he has one hand nearly destroyed, and a hole in his breast; in fact, he is dying."

"Good heavens! who told you that?"

"Manicamp brought him back just now to the house of a doctor here in Fontainebleau, and the rumor soon reached us all here."

"Brought back! Poor De Guiche; and how did it happen?"

"Ah, sire, that is the very question,—how did it happen?"

"You say that in a very singular manner, De Saint-Aignan. Give me the details. What does he himself say?"

"He says nothing, sire; but others do. I have heard something said about a quarrel between two gentlemen."

"When?"

"This very evening, before your majesty's supper was served."

"That can hardly be. I have issued such stringent and severe ordinances with respect to duelling, that no one, I presume, would dare to disobey them."

"In that case Heaven preserve me from excusing any one!" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan. "Your majesty commanded me to speak, and I speak."

"Tell me, then, in what way the Comte de Guiche has been wounded."

"Sire, it is said to have been at a boar-hunt."

"This evening?"

(From "The Vicomte de Bragelonne.")

"Yes, sire."

"One of his hands shattered, and a hole in his breast! Who was at the hunt with M. de Guiche?"

"I do not know, sire; but M. de Manicamp knows, or ought to know."

"You are concealing something from me, De Saint-Aignan."

"Nothing, sire, I assure you."

"Then explain to me how the accident happened; was it a musket that burst?"

"Verly likely, sire. But yet, on reflection, it could hardly have been that, for De Guiche's pistol was found close by him still loaded."

"His pistol? But a man does not go to a boar-hunt with a pistol."

"Sire, it is also said that De Guiche's horse was killed, and that the horse's body is still to be found in the clearing."

"His horse? De Guiche go on horseback to a boar-hunt! De Saint-Aignan, I do not understand a thing of what you have been telling me. Where did the affair happen?"

"At the circle, in the Rochin woods."

"That will do. Call M. d'Artagnan!"

De Saint-Aignan obeyed, and the musketeer entered.

"M. d'Artagnan," said the king, "you will leave this place by the little door of the private staircase."

"Yes, sire."

"You will mount your horse."

"Yes, sire."

"And you will proceed to the Rond-point du Bois-Rochin. Do you know the spot?"

"Yes, sire. I have fought there twice."

"What!" exclaimed the king, amazed at the reply.

"Under the edicts, sire, of Cardinal Richelieu," returned D'Artagnan, with his usual impassibility.

"That is very different, monsieur. You will, therefore, go there, and will examine the locality very carefully. A man has been wounded there, and you will find a horse lying dead. You will tell me what your opinion is upon the whole affair."

"Very good, sire."

"As a matter of course, it is your own opinion I require, and not that of any one else."

"You shall have it in an hour's time, sire."

"I prohibit your speaking with any one, whoever it may be."

"Except with the person who must give me a lantern," said D'Artagnan.

"Oh, that is a matter of course," said the king, laughing at the liberty, which he tolerated in no one but his captain of musketeers. D'Artagnan left by the little staircase.

Without losing a second he ran to the stable, took down the lantern, saddled his horse himself, and proceeded towards the place his majesty had indicated. According to the promise he had made, he had not accosted any one; and, as we have observed, he had carried his scruples so far as to do without the assistance of the stable-helpers altogether. D'Artagnan was one of those who in moments of difficulty pride themselves on increasing their own value. By dint of hard galloping, he in less than five minutes reached the wood, fastened his horse to the first tree he came to, and penetrated to the broad open space on foot. He then began to inspect most carefully, on foot and with his lantern in his hand, the whole surface of the Rond-point, went forward, turned back again, measured, examined, and after half an hour's minute inspection, he returned silently to where he had left his horse, and pursued his way in deep reflection and at a foot-pace to Fontainebleau. Louis was waiting in his cabinet; he was alone, and with a pencil was scribbling on paper certain lines which D'Artagnan at the first glance recognised as unequal and very much touched up. The conclusion he arrived at was, that they must be verses. The king raised his head and perceived D'Artagnan. "Well, monsieur," he said, "do you bring me any news?"

"Yes, sire."

"What have you seen?"

"As far as probability goes, sire," D'Artagnan began to reply.

"It was certainty I requested of you."

"I will approach it as near as I possibly can. The weather was very well adapted for investigations of the character I have just made; it has been raining this evening, and the roads were wet and muddy——"

"Well, the result, M. d'Artagnan?"

"Sire, your majesty told me that there was a horse lying dead in the cross-road of the Bois-Rochin, and I began, therefore, by studying the roads. I say the roads, because the center of the cross-road is reached by four separate roads. The one that I myself took was the only one that presented any fresh traces. Two horses had followed it side by side; their eight feet were marked very distinctly in the clay. One of the riders was more impatient than the other, for the footprints of the one were invariably in advance of the other about half a horse's length."

"Are you quite sure they were traveling together?" said the king.

"Yes, sire. The horses were two rather large animals of equal pace,—horses well used to maneuvers of all kinds, for they wheeled round the barrier of the Rond-point together."

"Well—and after?"

"The two cavaliers paused there for a minute, no doubt to arrange the conditions of the engagement; the horses grew restless and impatient. One of the riders spoke, while the other listened and seemed to have contented himself by simply answering. His horse pawed the ground, which proves that his attention was so taken up by listening that he let the bridle fall from his hand."

"A hostile meeting did take place then?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Continue; you are a very accurate observer."

"One of the two cavaliers remained where he was standing, the one, in fact, who had been listening; the other crossed the open space, and at first placed himself directly opposite to his adversary. The one who had remained stationary traversed the Rond-point at a gallop,

about two-thirds of its length, thinking that by this means he would gain upon his opponent; but the latter had followed the circumference of the wood."

"You are ignorant of their names, I suppose."

"Completely so, sire. Only he who followed the circumference of the wood was mounted on a black horse."

"How do you know that?"

"I found a few hairs of his tail among the brambles which bordered the sides of the ditch."

"Go on."

"As for the other horse, there can be no trouble in describing him, since he was left dead on the field of battle."

"What was the cause of his death?"

"A ball which had passed through his brain."

"Was the ball that of a pistol or a gun?"

"It was a pistol-bullet, sire. Besides, the manner in which the horse was wounded explained to me the tactics of the man who had killed it. He had followed the circumference of the wood in order to take his adversary in flank. Moreover, I followed his foot-tracks on the grass."

"The tracks of the black horse, do you mean?"

"Yes, sire."

"Go on, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

"As your majesty now perceives the position of the two adversaries, I will, for a moment, leave the cavalier who had remained stationary for the one who started off at a gallop."

"Do so."

"The horse of the cavalier who rode at full speed was killed on the spot."

"How do you know that?"

"The cavalier had not time even to throw himself off his horse, and so fell with it. I observed the impression of his leg, which, with a great effort, he was enabled to extricate from under the horse. The spur, pressed down by the weight of the animal, had plowed up the ground."

"Very good; and what did he do as soon as he rose up again?"

"He walked straight up to his adversary."

"Who still remained upon the verge of the forest?"

"Yes, sire. Then, having reached a favorable distance, he stopped firmly, for the impression of both his heels are left in the ground quite close to each other, fired, and missed his adversary."

"How do you know he did not hit him?"

"I found a hat with a ball through it."

"Ah, a proof, then!" exclaimed the king.

"Insufficient, sire," replied D'Artagnan, coldly; "it is a hat without any letters indicating its ownership, without arms; a red feather, as all hats have; the lace, even, had nothing particular in it."

"Did the man with the hat through which the bullet had passed fire a second time?"

"Oh, sire, he had already fired twice."

"How did you ascertain that?"

"I found the waddings of the pistol."

"And what became of the bullet which did not kill the horse?"

"It cut in two the feather of the hat belonging to him against whom it was directed, and broke a small birch at the other end of the open glade."

"In that case, then, the man on the black horse was disarmed, whilst his adversary had still one more shot to fire?"

"Sire, while the dismounted rider was extricating himself from his horse, the other was reloading his pistol. Only, he was much agitated while he was loading it, and his hand trembled greatly."

"How do you know that?"

"Half the charge fell to the ground, and he threw the ramrod aside, not having time to replace it in the pistol."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, this is marvelous you tell me."

"It is only close observation, sire, and the commonest highwayman could tell as much."

"The whole scene is before me from the manner in which you relate it."

"I have, in fact, reconstructed it in my own mind, with merely a few alterations."

"And now," said the king, "let us return to the dismounted cavalier. You were saying that he walked towards his adversary while the latter was loading his pistol."

"Yes; but at the very moment he himself was taking aim, the other fired."

"Oh!" said the king; "and the shot?"

"The shot told terribly, sire; the dismounted cavalier fell upon his face, after having staggered forward three or four paces."

"Where was he hit?"

"In two places; in the first place, in his right hand and then, by the same bullet, in his chest."

"But how could you ascertain that?" inquired the king full of admiration.

"By a very simple means; the butt end of the pistol was covered with blood, and the trace of the bullet could be observed, with fragments of a broken ring. The wounded man, in all probability, had the ring-finger and the little finger carried off."

"As far as the hand goes, I have nothing to say; but the chest?"

"Sire, there were two small pools of blood, at a distance of about two feet and a half from each other. At one of these pools of blood the grass was torn up by the clenched hand; at the other, the grass was simply pressed down by the weight of the body."

"Poor De Guiche!" exclaimed the king.

"Ah! it was M. de Guiche, then?" said the musketeer quietly. "I suspected it, but did not venture to mention it to your majesty."

"And what made you suspect it?"

"I recognised the De Grammont arms upon the holster of the dead horse."

"And you think he is seriously wounded?"

"Very seriously; since he fell immediately, and remained a long time in the same place; however, he was able to walk, as he left the spot, supported by two friends."

"You met him returning, then?"

"No; but I observed the footprints of three men; the one

on the right and the one on the left walked freely and easily, but the one in the middle dragged his feet as he walked; besides, he left traces of blood at every step he took."

"Now, monsieur, since you saw the combat so distinctly that not a single detail seems to have escaped you, tell me something about De Guiche's adversary."

"Oh, sire, I do not know him."

"And yet you see everything very clearly."

"Yes, sire, I see everything; but I do not tell all I see; and, since the poor devil has escaped, your majesty will permit me to say that I do not intend to denounce him."

"And yet he is guilty, since he has fought a duel, monsieur."

"Not guilty in my eyes, sire," said D'Artagnan, coldly.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed the king, "are you aware of what you are saying?"

"Perfectly, sire; but, according to my notions, a man who fights a duel is a brave man; such, at least, is my own opinion; but your majesty may have another, it is but natural, for you are master here."

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, I ordered you, however——"

D'Artagnan interrupted the king by a respectful gesture. "You ordered me, sire, to gather what particulars I could, respecting a hostile meeting that had taken place; those particulars you have. If you order me to arrest M. de Guiche's adversary, I will do so; but do not order me to denounce him to you, for in that case I will not obey."

"Very well! Arrest him, then."

"Give me his name, sire."

The king stamped his foot angrily; but after a moment's reflection, he said, "You are right—ten times, twenty times, a hundred times right."

"That is my opinion, sire: I am happy that, this time, it accords with your majesty's."

"One word more. Who assisted Guiche?"

"I do not know, sire."

"But you speak of two men. There was a person present, then, as second."

"There was no second, sire. Nay, more than that, when

M. de Guiche fell, his adversary fled without giving him any assistance."

"The miserable coward!" exclaimed the king.

"The consequence of your ordinances, sire. If a man has fought well, and fairly, and has already escaped one chance of death, he naturally wishes to escape a second. M. de Botteville cannot be forgotten very easily."

"And so, men turn cowards."

"No, they become prudent."

"And he has fled, then, you say?"

"Yes; and as fast as his horse could possibly carry him."

"In what direction?"

"In the direction of the chateau."

"Well, and after all that?"

"Afterwards, as I have had the honor of telling your majesty, two men on foot arrived, who carried M. de Guiche back with them."

"What proof have you that these men arrived after the combat?"

"A very evident proof, sire; at the moment the encounter took place, the rain had just ceased, the ground had not had time to imbibe the moisture, and was, consequently, soaked; the footsteps sank in the ground; but while M. de Guiche was lying there in a fainting condition, the ground became firm again, and the footsteps made a less sensible impression."

Louis clapped his hands together in sign of admiration. "Monsieur d'Artagnan," he said, "you are positively the cleverest man in my kingdom."

"The identical thing M. de Richelieu thought, and M. de Mazarin said, sire."

"And now, it remains for us to see if your sagacity is at fault."

"Oh, sire, a man may be mistaken; *errare humanum est*," said the musketeer, philosophically.

"In that case, you are not human, Monsieur d'Artagnan, for I believe you never are mistaken."